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DMITRI

A DRAMATIC SKETCH



MAJOR GENERAL

G.G. ALEXANDER C.B.

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DMITRI

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DMITRI

A DRAMATIC SKETCH from RUSSIAN HISTORY

BY

MAJOR-GENERAL G. G. ALEXANDER, C.B.

LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1876

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Stanton, A.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE are few more striking instances of successful imposture than that of the individual who, at the commencement of the seventeenth century, became Czar of Russia, and who is known in history as ‘the False Demetrius.’ A variety of circumstances had combined to favour his attempt. The energetic, but ruthlessly cruel, rule of Ivan ‘the Terrible’ had been followed by a period of anarchy, and the general discontent was intensified by the horrible and widely-spread sufferings, consequent on a succession of bad seasons, so that society had become completely disorganised, and all classes were ripe for revolt. A leader was alone wanted, and when a pretender appeared, and put forward a claim which appealed to some of the most cherished popular convictions, he obtained ready credence and support. But although

he was a man of remarkable ability, who had prepared himself with the greatest care for the part he had to play, his success would have been extremely doubtful had it not been for the aid afforded him—unquestionably on political grounds—by Sigismond and the Polish Diet ; neither could it have been assured had he failed to persuade the weak or ambitious Marpha—for the motives by which she was actuated seem doubtful—to recognise him as her son ; and in the following pages it is upon her action in this matter that his success is made mainly to depend.

In dealing with the character of Dmitri, the author, whilst preserving its most salient features, has sought to depict the strange complexities and contradictions, which would seem inseparable from the individuality of one who had made deception his rule of life, and whose very success had filled him with a cynical contempt for those whom he had deceived ; but it is only in the incidents which serve as the groundwork of the plot—such as the pretender's recognition by Marpha, his marriage with Marina, the pardon of Schouiski, the fidelity of Basmanoff, and the ' émeute ' which ended in his death—that any attempt has been made to preserve strict historical accuracy.

The episode itself is one singularly adapted for dramatic treatment ; but the author of the following sketch would hardly have ventured upon it, had he known at the time that the outline of a drama on the same subject, exhibiting in the boldness of its touches the skilful hand of a great master, was amongst Schiller's unfinished works.

PROLOGUE.

(JANUARY 23, 1874.)

O CZAR ! whose rule is o'er the wide-spread North,
Where men gain vigour in their fight for life
'Gainst all the hindrances which Nature flings
Athwart their daily paths—as if to try
How much each man can suffer, strive, and toil :
O Czar, all honour to thee ! Thou hast cast
Upon thy cold, and vast, and varied realm
A ray of light, which sheds in every heart
The warmth of Hope, for in its pure bright beam,
The form of Freedom stands revealed to all.
O Czar ! all honour to thee ! For thy aim
Had nought of selfishness, but holy thoughts
Served as thy councillors, and led thee on—
With Christian Charity upon thy side—
To free the Present from the fettered Past,
And turn to subjects, abject, life-thralled slaves.
O Czar ! all honour to thee ! For this deed—
If not for her sweet sake, beloved by all—
We had enshrined within our English hearts
The child entrusted to us : sacred pledge
Of friendship based on confidence and love.

DMITRI

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

DMITRI	<i>The impostor Czar.</i>
VASILI SCHOUISKI	<i>A powerful noble (afterwards Czar).</i>
ALEXIS SCHOUISKI	<i>His son.</i>
BASMANOFF	<i>A General—Minister and Confidant of Dmitri.</i>
OSWAROFF	<i>A merchant.</i>
IVAN OTRÉPIEF	<i>Father of the false Dmitri.</i>
VANOVITCH	<i>A citizen of Moscow.</i>

Soldiers, Citizens, Gaolers, &c.

MARPHA	<i>Widow of Ivan the Terrible, and mother of the prince personated by Dmitri.</i>
MARINA	<i>A noble Polish lady. wife of Dmitri.</i>
OLGA	<i>Daughter of Oswaroff, beloved by Alexis Schouiski.</i>
NADIA OTRÉPIEF	<i>Mother of the false Dmitri</i>
LOUSHA	<i>Servant to Olga.</i>

TIME.—*Commencement of Seventeenth Century.*

PLACE.—*Moscow.*

DMITRI.



ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Moscow. Apartment in the Kremlin.*

DMITRI. BASMANOFF.

(DMITRI stands as if absorbed in thought.)

BASMANOFF.

A few short years ago what man had dared
To shadow forth the action of this time?—
To say that Moscow would have ope'd her gates
To hail thee 'Father'! welcome thee with tears—
As Dmitri, son of Ivan, Russia's Czar?

DMITRI.

Aye, my Basmanoff, who had thought all this?
Not the base herd, whose eyes are seldom raised
From off the ground on which their pasture lies;

B

Nor even men of mark, who pride themselves
On seeing farther than their fellows can.
Yet there was one foresaw it, years, years since,
When mured within his cell—a wretched monk.

BASMANOFF.

Thrice happy monk to have such golden dreams !

DMITRI.

Dost call him happy ? Little dost thou know.
But thou *must* know. Look well within thine heart,
Until thou find'st a lie—a little lie,—
It matters not how small thou findest it.
Then know the canker-worm, which gnaws, and gnaws,
And ever gnaws, till it turns joy to pain,
Soft love to hate, sweet smiles to bitter tears.

BASMANOFF.

I will not look : he needs a heart of stone
Who would have mastery o'er other men.
Were it not so, how could he act or judge,
When scruples born of conscience might spring up
To draw comparisons—may be quite just—
And make him say, 'Thou art the better man :
Pray pardon me, and take the place I hold.'—
With all this virtue, why didst doff the cowl ?

DMITRI.

Why did I *don* it, rather, Basmanoff.—
I'll tell thee. It was this. Within my breast
I felt a restless craving, which I deemed
The devil's malice. This I sought to check,
And so took refuge in a peaceful cell,
To practise patience and a Christian life.

BASMANOFF.

The thoughtless tumult of a soldier's life
Had been the better balsam for your wound.

DMITRI.

I had been taught the world was full of pits,
Dug to entrap the heedless steps of youth :
A single stumble, then a headlong fall
Down, down, and ever down, with no escape,
To where the flames of hell rise greedily
To welcome poor lost souls to endless pain.
I had been taught the cursèd, coward creed,
That he who would escape this cruel end—
An end without an end, so horrible
That man's depravity alone could give
Conception to it, dare to call it God's—
Must shut his eyes upon the outer world,

Must close his heart to Nature's warning voice,
Which says to man, ' There is an aim in life,
Work out this aim—take heed thou do'st it well—
Work with thy hands, thy brain, thy heart, thy soul ;
Work for thy fellow men, work for thy God ;
And, looking up to heaven or down to earth—
No matter where—let every glance speak love.'

BASMANOFF (*scoffingly*).

Love-speaking glances scattered everywhere!

DMITRI (*unheeding the interruption*).

Mured in my cell, I thought to fly the world—
The world as pictured by a monkish hand
Upon my sickly brain.—The world was *there*—
The world without its action—dead as 'twere.
For action is the source from whence proceeds
All healthy life. It is as the broad sea :
Give it but motion, and in every breeze
Which sweeps across it there is health and strength.
But oh how putrid, filled with slimy things,
Would be the ocean were it always calm—
No gales, no storms, no hurricanes, no wrecks—
But pestilential airs which none might breathe,
And death and ruin hovering over all. (*After a pause.*)

Yes ! I was home taught and a slave to fears—
Pitiful fears, which made each thought a sin,
This world a hell, my fellow men half fiends.
And so I sought the refuge I had learnt
To look on as an ark of holiness.

BASMANOFF.

Didst find it so ?

DMITRI.

How canst thou mock me thus ?

I found a sepulchre ; all pure without,
A thing of rottenness and dust within.
It brought me back to reason. Ah ! too late.
I stood before myself a living lie—
No matter what my life—a living lie.
Surely, I said, the end must be the same,
Whether I clothe this lie in purple state,
Or hide and vex it 'neath a shirt of hair ?
If sin be death, and if I still must sin,
At least my sins shall give me in this world
Some little vantage. I will mount on lies
Until I scale the very topmost height ;
Then gazing down upon the world beneath
Will bathe my spirit in its sensuous joys.

BASMANOFF.

The height is gained. Hast thou yet found the joys?

DMITRI.

I had some foretaste of them in the shouts
Which greeted me to-day. Alas! poor fools,
It can but touch me when I see their love.
But yet, how soon, some centuries ago,
Were the 'hosannahs' of a people changed
To angry cries of 'Off with him, away!
Give us Barabbas!' Such the people's choice.

BASMANOFF.

This is a mood befits nor time nor place.
Would we deceive the world we must begin
By cheating every sense, until we stand
Even before ourselves what we would seem.
Take courage, Sire! Gregorio is dead.
Believe as we do—that is, in yourself.

DMITRI.

Most true, Basmanoff. It is dangerous
Even to think such words as I have spoke.
But if you only knew how sweet it is
To pour in human ear these pent-up thoughts—

Which seem at times as if they would burst forth
And in a surging flood of phrensied words
Lay bare their secrets to the gaping crowd—
You would not wonder at my present mood.
But it is over. Shadows of the past
Shall not obscure the present. They are gone.
The floods and fogs of the dark wintry days
But make the summer brighter.

BASMANOFF.

It may be so,
But brightest summers have their clouds and storms;
And at this very time, when all would seem
So still and peaceful, whispers are abroad,
Which, if not silenced, may in little space
Become a hurricane across our path
And sweep us all to ruin—aye, to death !

DMITRI.

What are these whispers ?

BASMANOFF.

Inklings of the truth.
Some hold thou art not what thou say'st thou art,
Or long ere this hadst thou been Ivan's son—
Marpha had owned thee.

DMITRI.

If they want but this
To make them loyal and dutiful—'tis well,
And they shall have it : Aye, and in brief space—
Marpha is here. (*Assuming an air of intense feeling.*)

Oh ! how my filial heart
Leaps at the thought ! my right royal mother here !
And ere to-morrow has consumed a day,
Before the nobles in old Kremlin's halls
Shall her joy-gushing tears bedew that child
O'er whose sad fate she has so mourned for years.

BASMANOFF.

But will she own thee ?

DMITRI.

Canst thou doubt she will ?
When I am here in Moscow, in these walls,
The Czar of Russia ? When I've reached this height
Unaided by all else but my good star ?
It is so fated. I was born to rule,
To gain an influence o'er my brother clods ;
What matter then to them from whence I come ?
Yet if they'll have it so, then so shall be.
For the great Boris murder gained a throne ;

A passion for command has given me mine,
And 'tis not murder, but 'a mother's love'
Shall place me firmly on it. (*Sadly*) A mother's love—
I once possessed it. (*Changing his tone.*)

Maudling folly this—
I am the son of Marpha, and am Czar.

BASMANOFF.

But every question has at least two sides?

DMITRI (*interrupting*).

Two hundred rather. If it were not thus
So marked the difference 'twixt right and wrong,
That man no longer could his purpose clothe
In virtue's garb to fool his fellows with.

BASMANOFF.

You are too subtle. Come now to the point.
Marpha disowns thee?

DMITRI (*with decision*).

It shall not be so.
She is a woman, and I never yet
Found one I could not make at will my slave.

BASMANOFF.

Not one?

DMITRI (*thoughtfully*).

Yes : one there was. Ah ! long ago.

But then I loved her—loved her as my soul,
And so had lost the power to do her wrong.

BASMANOFF.

Did she return this love ?

DMITRI.

I think she did.

BASMANOFF.

If it were so, what stood betwixt you both ?

DMITRI.

A youthful folly magnified to crime.

BASMANOFF.

What did her lover then ?

DMITRI.

Fell sick with grief.

BASMANOFF.

Of course she died ?

DMITRI.

Come, cease this jesting.

I did not know that I was still so weak.

Let the past go—why bring its memories back ?

BASMANOFF.

Ah ! why, indeed, when but a few weeks since
So fair a partner deigned to share thy throne ?

DMITRI.

The beautiful Marina ! Woe is me !
I could not, if I would, forget my bride,
Or cease to marvel that 'twas this poor hand
Which gave such pride and haughtiness its place.
Her gaze is too much on me ; and each glance—
So cold and yet so piercing—makes me feel
As birds are said to feel when first they catch
The fascination of a serpent's eye.

BASMANOFF.

On what compulsion didst thou marry her ?

DMITRI.

Have I not made her father my firm friend
And bound his interests and mine in one ?

BASMANOFF.

The thought of this should make the yoke seem
light.

DMITRI.

Marriage may be a yoke with love or hate :

It cannot be so with indifference.
An easy method to achieve an end :
I would that all things were as simply gained.
But peace, Basmanoff! we have much to do.
There still are parts in the royal web I've wove
Whose fabric is not all of equal strength.
We must embroider them with golden threads,
And so conceal their weakness. Basmanoff,
Be diligent in this ; upon thy help
I place my chief reliance. I stand first ;
Remember thou art second. If I fall,
Thou canst not save thyself from being crushed.
Think well of this, and keep a careful watch :
Danger grows less when there is vigilance.

BASMANOFF.

If I must walk with thee along these paths,
Where one false step may dash us to the ground,
It is my right to proffer thee advice
And give thee counsel ere it is too late.
I have observed, at times, a want of care
In many words and acts, which tend to wound
Those who at best are only seeming friends ;
Some biting jest, some gibe, some home-sent thrust,
The more remembered that 'tis well deserved.

DMITRI.

Psha ! my Basmanoff, let not thus thy fears
Lead thee to magnify my harmless mirth :
The rugged temper of our Russian boors
Needs to be somewhat rubbed to cure its dullness.
We would have some slight polish at our Court :
Without it rather would I pitch my tent
Upon the steppes, and rule o'er Tartar hordes.
But I'll be cautious—weigh each little word.—
Now for the time, my Basmanoff, Adieu !
A mother waits to claim her long-lost son :
I go to act my part, forget not thine. [Exit.

BASMANOFF.

'Tis wonderful ! I think I am bewitched.
I can but love him though I know him false.
But who could, knowing all, wish in his veins
There flowed one single drop of Ivan's blood ?
Yet knowing all, 'tis so the people wish.
They care not what the rule, if can be said
The ruler crushes them by right divine.
Dmitri is Czar ! But in my hand I hold
His life, his fate : I glory in this power.
But shall I use it ? Shall I stamp him out ?
Hold him to public scorn, a poor vile thing

O'erwhelmed with all the shame detection brings,
In order that some knave of lesser worth
May wield the sceptre—some one not my friend,
Perchance my foe? A subject this for thought.
He may be false ; no matter, he is Czar ;
His hand is open and he is my friend—
My closest friend. I think I see my way.
Yes ! from this moment Ill be true and loyal.
The die is cast—by him I stand or fall.
Look to it traitors, who now plot his death,
And think that Basmanoff is on your side.
Dmitri, my Czar, you shall owe all to me,
And prove that there is gratitude in kings. [Exit.

SCENE II.—*Moscow. A room in a Convent.*

MARPHA. A LADY.

MARPHA.

After so many years of hopeless grief,
Why am I here in Moscow ? do I dream ?

LADY.

Madam, as I have said, to see your son.

MARPHA.

My son ! ye saints, oh why am I thus mocked ?

Oh why does Heaven thus try my failing strength?
My son? I had but one, an angel-boy,
So sweet and pure that my fond foolish heart
Was censed with holy joy. It was as if
An angel had been sent to bless my house
And draw me nearer to the saints in Heaven.

LADY.

And that child, Madam, lives and is the Czar.

MARPHA.

And that child died, aye died, torn from these arms
By fiends in human form. Incredible!
The saints, too, looking on! But I blaspheme.
Oh blessed Jesu, pardon me; I know
That it is better with him in Thine arms.

LADY.

A child no more, but in his place a man
In whom has ripened all your fondest hopes;
And now he comes to seek a mother's love,
A mother's blessing, on his princely head.

MARPHA.

My angel-boy is now a saint in Heaven.
I know and feel it. *This* is not my son.

MARPHA.

Who art thou?

DMITRI.

A suppliant for thy love:
The Czar of Russia and thy long-lost son.

MARPHA.

No, no—No, no! A hundred times I say
Thou art no son of mine. I had but one,
An angel now in heaven.

DMITRI.

Would it were so
If thus, alas! a mother's lips can frame
Such cruel words. Spare me, oh mother, spare
Thy long-tried son. Kill not like this his hopes.
Canst thou unmoved behold him at thy feet?
Oh mother, mother! why disown thy child?

MARPHA.

My child? my child? Oh, hadst thou been my
child
Would years have passed and I in ignorance
And bitterness of heart been left to weep—

C

Until, wept out, my tears refused to flow—
In my poor cell? My child had flown on wings
Into mine arms. Thou art no child of mine,
Or every fibre of my frame had thrilled
At thy approach—my heart had leapt for joy,
And Nature's voice had spoken in such tones
That I had oped my arms, and to my breast
Pressed in all love the choicest of God's gifts.
My child? 'Tis false! I say thou art no child,
No son, of mine.

DMITRI (*rising*).

Madam, if it be false—

Alas, alas! Farewell to all my hopes.
But wherefore was I tutored to believe
That I was ~~him~~ ^{he} ~~whole~~ now it seems I am not?
Wherefore, but for your love, should I have striven
To climb up to the place which right had given—
Tho' wrong had seized it—to the Prince, your son?
It was my sweetest solace, when most tried,
To picture, when I had gained what was mine own,
How I would come as now, and throw myself—
No trembling fugitive, but with the crown
Worn by my father, and my rightful due—
Down at my mother's feet, and say, 'Behold
Thy son—the Czar—who claims a mother's love.'

MARPHA.

Oh ! wert thou but her child she would give her love
As she has given her tears—tears such as flow
From woman's eyes when she has known the pang
Of losing all she loved. But speak ! oh speak !
Why this long silence if thou wert my son—
This dreadful silence ? More than twenty years
No voice, no whisper, not one breath of hope,
To calm the anguish of a mother's heart.

DMITRI.

For years I was a stranger to myself—
Taught to believe a lie—until my blood
Hot coursing through my veins made me assert
A sway o'er those that held me in their toils ;
Then 'twas that, weary of a puppet's rule,
Their hearts were once more turned to Ruric's race,
And the poor monk—the Monk Gregorio—
Emerging from his cell, yet not untaught—
For instinct as it were had turned his thoughts
Towards all the arts befitting a high state—
Gained step by step, contending, till he stood
Once more within the Kremlin's sacred walls :
Victorious, he dares claim a mother's love ;
Defeated, he had spared a mother's tears.'

MARPHA.

Oh, Holy Thomas ! help me in this strait.
If this be true, oh help me not to doubt.

DMITRI.

Was there no mark, no signet as 'twere, set
Upon thy babe, which thou couldst recognise ?
Search in thy memory ; see if there be aught
With which thou couldst without a shade of doubt
Encompass the identity of one
Whose fate hangs balanced by a single word.
(*Passionately*) Oh mother, mother ! strive to know
thy child.

MARPHA.

Yes, I remember, when my saint was born
The nurse, half jesting, half in earnestness,
Called my attention to a little mark
Which had a cross's shape upon his neck,
And said, ' See, madam, how the holy saints
Have placed the blessed sign upon your babe
To scare the evil one and save his soul.'

DMITRI (*tearing open his collar*).

The saints be praised ! Behold, the cross is here.

MARPHA (*with hesitation*).

I scarce can see it : or my sight is dim,
Or time has weakened what was once defined
So sharply that no lineament was lost.
But art thou, truly then, the son I mourn?
Swear that thou art.

DMITRI.

By all the saints I swear
I am the Czar of Russia . . .

MARPHA (*interrupting*).

'Tis the voice
And manner of his father. Now the mark
Shows out more plainly : it was Ivan's voice—
Ah ! now I catch it—'tis the blessèd sign.
My prayers are answered. Oh ! my son, forgive
These cruel doubts. I know thee now, my child ;
Oh let me press thee to this aching heart
[*Throws herself into his arms.*
And then proclaim thee to the world—my son.

SCENE III.—*Moscow. The Palace of the Schouiskis.*
An inner room.

(VASILI SCHOUISKI *seated at a table covered with papers.*
ALEXIS SCHOUISKI *pacing up and down.*)

VASILI SCHOUISKI (*showing signs of impatience*).
My dear Alexis, why this restlessness?

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Shall I, sir, leave you?

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

No! I wish you here.
But I am nervous, and each step you take
Affects me strangely.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Then, sir, I'll sit down.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

I really know not why I am so weak.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

You work too much, sir—o'erstrain eyes and
brain.

The bow is weakened if kept too long bent.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

But what use is it if it be not bent?
And if the shaft it sends but hit the mark,
What matter if it break?—its work is done.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

What is the object, sir, you have in view?
It seems a matter weighted deep with care.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Which thou must share.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Oh ! let me bear it all :
I have at least the health and strength of youth.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

But not the caution which belongs to age.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Caution and action are antagonists.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Sometimes, I grant ; but when they are allied
(*Sternly*) Let them beware 'gainst whom they are
arrayed.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

You speak as if within your words lay hid
Some secret meaning. Why so earnest, sir ?

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

me. Because, ere long, for age and youth alike—
For you and ~~I~~—cold caution, hot pursuit—
There will be work, work for which even now
I lay the plans. Canst guess what that work is ?

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

How can I guess when I have kept aloof
From all intrigues affecting court or state ?
I am too young for politics, too fond
Of selfish ease, to sacrifice myself
On any altar . . .

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

But that raised to love.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Alas ! the sacrifice would not be mine.
Would I could make it !

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

And disgrace your birth.

Oh ! cease, my son, to cherish this vain dream—
This idle folly. When some years have past,
Thy father will be blest for this same course,
Which now is deemed so tyrannous and harsh.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Know this, my father, if he can naught else,
Thy son can show his constancy in love.
Some things there are so rooted in ourselves,
That when wrenched from us it is with our lives.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

My son, it is my duty. Bear in mind
Thou art my only son—the Schouiskis' heir.
Our noble house stands first in this great land ;
First in all Russia. If the Czar should fall,
Upon us Schouiskis would all eyes be fixed,
As even now the eyes of those are fixed
Whose stronger vision underlooks the glare,
The gloss, the tinsel, which deceives the crowd.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

The gloss, the tinsel, which deceives the crowd?

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

There is a varnish makes a clever knave
Seem sterling metal when mere counterfeit.
You must have heard the rumours, whispered once,
But now proclaimed with brazen tongues abroad.
You must have heard how men speak of the Czar.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

With little heed, knowing how rumour lies—
And doubly lies when blasting Dmitri's fame.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Rumour speaks truth, Alexis. We are dupes,
Dupes of an artifice so palpable
It makes me blush to think we've been deceived.
Dmitri is false. He is not Ivan's son.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Who, then ?

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

It is well known. A perjured monk,
Known as Gregorio : before his vows
Called Youri Otrépief. See here the proofs.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

I've heard that name, but know not when or
where.

Is there no room for doubt?

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

You best can judge

From this: last night, I and a few sure friends
Made oath on Christ's own picture to wipe off
This foul spot from our honour, or to die—
Cleansed from its cursèd stain—in the attempt.
You must be with us.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

When I am convinced,

But not one step until I am convinced.

We've fought for Dmitri : placed upon his head
The crown fresh plucked from those who had no
right

To give or wear it. Then, too, we had proofs,
Proofs that he was the heir, the rightful heir,
Saved by a miracle from impious hands,
Who would have ended by a bloody death
The race of Ruric. Why, then, should we now
Declare him false, ourselves poor simple fools;

Open afresh the scarce yet closed up wounds
Inflicted on our country by her sons?
Let me beseech you, do not move in this.

VASILY SCHOUISKI.

Too late, my son! I had the selfsame thought
When first I learnt how false was this man's claim :
And had it rested with myself alone,
The secret had been buried in my breast.
But it is known to others. They would act
If we drew back ; and I were doubly shamed—
Holding the place I do—to find myself
Ranked with a wretched criminal like this.
My duty to the state and to myself
Bids me go on.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Sir, have you weighed the risk ?

VASILY SCHOUISKI.

The danger is as great on either side.
We stand, like travellers on a giddy height,
From which they see, just barely visible,
A little cloud—a vapour—scarcely more ;
And yet they shudder, for in that small cloud
They see the token of a coming storm.

'Twere death to meet it where they trembling stand,
And rolling mists shut out the onward track—
They must retrace their steps whilst there is time,
And tho' the storm may burst, they yet may reach
A point of safety by some surer path.
But there are other reasons urge me on ;
In this I can but see the hand of God,
And feel that I am but His instrument.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

I hardly care to follow you in this.
Had I my choice, my greatest wish would be
To lead a tranquil life—so full of peace
That I might gaze back on it from its verge,
And find it smooth and smiling, like a sea
Whose placid beauty bids the zephyrs hush.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Such words betray a mind made sick by love.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

What health is found in fevered restlessness,
In jealous rivalry, suspicious fears ?
Hateful Ambition ! Thou hast been the rock
On which my hopes lie shipwrecked. But for thee
A father's lips had not refused to speak
The one short word which would have bless'd his son.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Speak not again of this : it cannot be.
The Schouiskis' heir receives a father's curse
The moment that he dares—dares to forget
His princely race and wed beneath his rank.
No more of this. *[A knock at the door.*
 'Tis Basmanoff. Come in !

SCENE IV.—*The Same.*

VASILI SCHOUISKI. ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.
 BASMANOFF.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Ha ! Basmanoff, I thought 'twas you ; your steps,
No matter where the place, how gently paced,
As if by magic seem to strike my ear.
You're welcome, Basmanoff : come in right time.
You know my son : I would he were as you,
Giving his time and thoughts to state affairs.
But at his age, in these degenerate days,
Young men are dreamers and leave us to think.

BASMANOFF (*bowing to Alexis*).

A golden age, fraught with delicious dreams,
We all have had them ; but they do not last.

The stormy winters of a few short years
Change smoothest sapling to the rough gnarled trunk.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

But not its nature. Acorns grow to oaks,
And poisonous weeds grow ranker day by day.

BASMANOFF.

Most true, young sir, and so 'tis we must try
To top their branches ere they kill the ground.
'Tis on this very subject I have come
To see your father.

VASIL SCHOUISKI.

He knows our purpose.
I have spoke to him.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

But gained no promise.
I as yet am free from all but knowing
What I would not know. (*To Vasili Schouiski*) Oh !
sir, pardon me
If I offend in this. At least be sure
That every word which you would wish unsaid
I hold as sacred, locked up in my breast. [*Exit.*

BASMANOFF.

Hast told him all? My lord, 'twas indiscreet.

VASIL SCHOUISKI.

Not all. Indeed, I could not tell him much,
For to my words he lent no willing ear.
He thinks of nothing but his hapless love
For Olga Oswaroff, a girl of Kief,
The daughter of the merchant, he whose life
Alexis saved when fast beset by wolves.

BASMANOFF.

Surely a noble need not marry her.

VASIL SCHOUISKI.

He has no other thought ; and in her pride—
For she is proud as beautiful—she swears
That, love him as she may, she is not his
Until I give my blessing and consent.

BASMANOFF.

And will you give it?

VASIL SCHOUISKI.

Never ! as I live.
I hold too high the honour of our house

To mix its noble blood with that of churls.
Were I not what I am, she should be his.

BASMANOFF.

But can you trust him? think you we are safe?
Is his discretion all that you could wish?
May he not use this secret as a power
To force concession to this foolish whim?

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

He is the soul of honour, and my son.

BASMANOFF.

Enough, if you are sure. Now, to our work.
Have you collected all the proofs we need?

VASILI SCHOUISKI (*showing some papers*).

Yes, all are here ; there wants no single link.
This list of those who join us stands complete.

BASMANOFF.

It only rests, then, to appoint the time,
And so arrange our action that we bring
All Moscow round us.

D

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Why not at once ?

The traitor's head, the story of his guilt,
Backed by these proofs, will tell the people all.

BASMANOFF.

Because, my lord, our lives hang on success,
And hurried action might endanger it.
The public mind is not yet fully ripe ;
For in this Czar is seen the choice of God.
But there are signs—signs which show more and
more—

To indicate an ebb in their content :
This Polish marriage, with these Polish laws ;
These Polish guards who swagger through our streets,
Cause growing comment, and each day we wait
A thousand hearts are turned to our good cause.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

But what of Marpha ? If we thus lose time,
And she should recognise her murdered son
In Youri Otrépief ? How stand we then ?

BASMANOFF.

Not the less firmly. Will she be believed ?
Or would she hold to it against these proofs ?

The minds of women are like waxen seals,
Apply some fiery words, there is a blank
Ready to take, if you but chose the time,
Whatever impress you would have it bear.

VASILY SCHOUISKI.

You counsel, then, delay?

BASMANOFF.

For some brief space.
Meanwhile be cautious : keep from prying eyes
All documents and plans which bear on this ;
And which, if found, might bring us to the block.

VASILY SCHOUISKI (*pointing to a secret drawer in his cabinet*).

This is a place unknown to all but me.

BASMANOFF.

Then it is settled that we wait some days—
A little patience and they soon will pass.

VASILY SCHOUISKI.

Patience is needed when delay is shame :
To play the courtier to a counterfeit,
In such an atmosphere of foul deceit,

Fills me with loathing. Pah ! I could not live
Much longer in it. Well that men don't know
To what base uses they may turn their lives.

BASMANOFF.

Haply for man, the future lies behind
A darkened veil he cannot draw aside :
To penetrate beyond it would unnerve
The strongest will, and make it impotent :
Like the poor sheep, which in mute helplessness
Can only tremble at the upraised knife,
He would bend down in silence and despair—
Helpless and hopeless, without end or aim—
Before the coming evil, undergone,
With mental anguish not to be assuaged,
In endless frequency, before it came.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Why paint so sad a picture, Basmanoff?
Such gloomy thoughts hang o'er me like a pall.

BASMANOFF.

An evil habit to speak out such thoughts :
A still worse habit to indulge in them.
I pray you pardon it. Now I must go
Back to my duties—wreathe my face in smiles,

In humble service. Ah ! such work as mine
Is never ended. First a wedding comes
With all its pageantry, and then the crown
Has to be placed, amidst all Moscow's shouts,
Upon the head we wot of. Ah ! indeed,
You little know the labour all this brings.
Frolic and feasting, and if all go well,
A fitting finish in a funeral. [*Exit.*

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

I like Basmanoff least when he does jest.
He is so bitter, that I then, forsooth,
Must think of poison. It is but his way—
Not over pleasant, perhaps, but still his way.

•

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Moscow. Room in OSWAROFF'S house.*

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI. OLGA.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Now I must leave you. (*Looks at the clock.*)

Ah! how time has flown!

Three hours have passed, and I scarce deemed them
one.

And I have been so silent all the while !
I am so stupid ! Now I hold thy love,
For half my happiness I find no words.
Methinks thou wilt be glad when I am gone ;
For even now, when I must say farewell,
That tell-tale dimple warns me of a smile.

OLGA.

Poor foolish boy ! Wouldst thou, then, have me
weep,
And spoil my eyes each time we say 'good-bye' ?

I have no faith in love which makes those sad
Who know with usury it is returned.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

When I am absent wilt thou think of me?

OLGA.

I make no promise, sir, and ask for none.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

None? Dost thou not fear my freedom?

OLGA.

As much

As I might fear a close caged bird could fly.
I hold thee far too tightly in my heart—
Imprisoned, manacled, so strongly chained—
There can be no escape, unless, indeed,
Thou wouldst obtain thy freedom : then, sir knight,
How dost thou know that I would bid thee stay?

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Ah ! empty prisons are so dull and drear,
And thou wouldst miss the music of my chains,
Clanking in concert with my groans and sighs.

OLGA.

Pray, Sir Conceited, dost thou think the world
Could not provide another valiant swain
To fall a captive to my bow and spear?
We Amazons are victors when we fight,
For with one glance we light the torch of love,
And in its flame consume the venturous foe.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

And sometimes scorch yourselves. Is it not so?

OLGA.

I do not know, I speak but for myself.
I have not felt the torture of love's fire—
You do not hear *me* sigh, *I* do not burn:
Just feel my hand, is it not cool?

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI (*taking her hand*).

And soft.

OLGA (*withdrawing it, and striking him playfully*).

Nay, if it be, thou needst not squeeze it so.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Ah ! now, indeed, I find it far too hard.
But tell me, my sweet Olga, ere I go—

To cheer my absence—when wilt thou be mine?
I live from day to day, the Past has gone ;
The Present flies so swiftly: where is Hope,
Unless a future opens on the view ?
My heart is out of tune, and but for thee
I know not how I could endure to live—
All seems so false and hollow. Everywhere
I find the selfsame motives urging on
The busy crowds. The noblest, the most base ;
The richest, poorest in the gifts of love ;
The bravest, cowards should a shadow fall
Across the path which leads them on to fame.
Ambition rules, and selfish interests
Are chiefs in council ; whilst, alas ! we find
That all the purer instincts of our hearts
Are nipped by the chill breath of worldliness.
Ah ! but for thee, the ‘pole star’ of my life,
My way were lost in this great wilderness.

OLGA.

Alexis, if I smile, and sometimes jest,
Wounding unwittingly thy tenderness,
It is I am so happy in thy love.
My life, my heart, my very soul is thine.
Thou art not angry ?

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Angry with my sweet ?
How can she ask me—and because she smiles ?
If I am petulant, it is because
I am so powerless. Oh, grant my prayer !
Come fly with me to some bright peaceful land,
Where naught shall stand between us and our love.
But thou art silent, Olga ! What ! In tears !
Wretch that I am—heed not these idle words.

OLGA.

Were I to speak the promptings of my heart,
They would re-echo every thought of thine :
But duty has a higher claim than love.
I am but a weak woman—a poor girl :
Oh let me lean upon thee—give me strength.
Thou art the oak : I, but a creeping plant,
Must trail upon the ground but for some help,
Oh ! let that help be thine—that I may stand
So strong and stedfast, that I cease to be
A plaything for the winds. Be thou but firm
And I will cling to thee and fear no harm.
Alexis. No ! Thou wouldst not have me speak
Soft foolish words, because they might sound sweet—
Sweet for a moment—to a lover's ear ?

Thy father may relent. Oh let us pray
The saints with greater fervour—they will hear.
We may not wed at once ; but we can wait.
Is waiting, then, so terrible to thee?
Ah, fie ! Alexis. I could wait and wait,
And deem my life too short, if loved by thee.
I would I were thy sister, that I might
Be ever with thee.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Ah ! a sister's love,
Like snow when breathed upon by balmy spring,
Soon melts away before a suitor's sighs.
The brother's portion of a sister's heart
Is either very small, or else he holds
Uncertain tenure of the whole domain ;
Where I, for life at least, would reign supreme.

OLGA.

Believe me, it is thine. ' Oh, do not doubt !
True love has faith—is nourished by belief ;
Suspicion breathes upon it and it dies.
My love is full of hope, and that is why
My happiness betrays itself in smiles.
Still let me smile, tho' it be thro' my tears.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

Oh ! my own sweet, my love is put to shame.
I will restrain these fitful peevish moods :
Living for thee, I, too, will learn to wait.
Yes ! Truest love is that which best endures,
And by my patience thou shalt measure mine.
Come, smile again, that I may bear with me
A radiant picture of thy own dear self,
To let my fancy dwell upon, and cheer
My darker spirit till I come again.

OLGA.

When wilt thou come ? It must be very soon :
And then, if thou art good, I'll sing to thee,
And thou shalt tell me tales, and I will laugh,
Or weep, or may be scold—or each in turn—
But be quite sure of this, that I shall scold
If but a shadow flit across your brow.

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI.

I swear upon this little hand to come ;
Upon this dainty, pink-tipped little hand,
To cast behind me every gloomy thought,
And come to thee without a trace of care. *[Exit.*
 [OLGA remains with her eyes fixed on the door by
 which he goes out.

OLGA.

I love him so ! He is so kind, so good.
But do I really love him ? If I did
Should I not say to him—as I have said
A hundred times—but with more firmness, ‘Go !
Thou art a noble ; I, a merchant’s child,
Am no fit mate for thee. Go seek elsewhere
For one more blest by fortune : ask her love.’
But I have said all this, and said much more,
Striving to show how weak he is in this ;
And all the answer that he deigns to make,
‘Silence, my Olga, wouldst thou have me die ?’
It is his will. He saved my father’s life :
I owe him all. I dare not spurn his love,
Or feign a coldness which I do not feel.
I am not worthy of him : yet am loved.
Were I unworthy, could I have this love ?
I *must* be worthy, for his love is mine ;
And tho’ not noble, where a child more blest
Than I have been ? My mother was a saint,
Whose life was a short journey, and its end
The simple reaching of her home in Heaven.
And never, never could a daughter claim
A nobler father. Hark ! I hear his voice.

[*Enter* OSWAROFF.]

SCENE II.—*The Same.*

OSWAROFF. OLGA.

OSWAROFF.

Olga, my child ! Alexis has been here.
He comes too often and I like it not.
Why comes he here ?

OLGA.

Father ! He saved your life
And loves your little daughter—that is why.

OSWAROFF (*smiling*).

Two weighty reasons : but I think the last
The one which answers for his presence best.
Were it the other, then, indeed, I would
There was a sum could cancel gratitude,
That I might pay the debt and set you free.
Pier Not only you but ~~he~~ : unconscious both
How great the danger of this foolish love.

OLGA.

If love be folly, I would not be wise.

OSWAROFF.

Love is not love when it would injure those
On whom it centres all its tenderness.

OLGA.

But who would do so?

OSWAROFF.

Even thou, my child.

OLGA.

What, injure him? Alexis!

OSWAROFF.

Even so.

Aye! injure him. Wither his very life—
Blast all his hopes, destroy each noble aim,
Decoy him from the path fortune had smoothed—
And think'st when thou hast done so, he will still
Hang all his happiness upon thy love?

OLGA.

Oh, father, can it be that this is true?

OSWAROFF.

You know not, in the innocence of youth,
How hard the fate of those who would o'erstep

The narrow limits which enclose their class.
Men are not weighed by merit in this world,
But measured by a rule which only gives
The length and breadth of their advantages—
Rank, riches, honours, those mere counterfeits
Which take the place of Nature's higher gifts.
Were it not so, what rank could surpass thine ?
Could jewelled diadems—mere grown men's toys—
Show out with greater lustre than the crown
Which purity has placed on thy fair brow ?
Where is the gold which could be found to buy
At God's own price thy gentle modesty ?
My child—these gifts, these honours, come from
 Heaven,
Which, when it gave thee life, took in exchange
A sainted spirit, far too pure for earth.
Thou art the link which binds me to the past,
My present joy, my only future hope.
Oh ! could I live to see thy husband spurned,
And thou sad, silent, weeping, the poor cause ?
'Twould break my heart. I know it would break
 thine.
I love thee, my poor child—I love you both.
I would Alexis were not Schouiski's son,
That I might place thy hand in his, and say,
' Alexis, take her, wear her in your heart.'

OLGA.

And can this never be ?

OSWAROFF.

Unless he gain
His father's sanction. It should be with pride,
And not with shame, or fear allied with shame,
That he should seek thy hand.

OLGA.

Let us but wait—
The saints will hear our prayers, let us but wait.
Thy little daughter asks no more of thee ;
If he were here, he would but ask to wait :
Our hearts are one in this, both his and mine.

OSWAROFF.

I am so weak, you mould me to your will.
Go, silly child, I cannot say thee nay,
For I am selfish and like beaming eyes.
Thou still mayst wait. But I would have thee know
That one, or both, may wait to weariness.

OLGA.

My darling father, take a thousand thanks
For saying ' yes,'—not for those naughty words :
How can you speak of love and weariness ?

E

(*Sings*) Love is sunshine, love is mirth,
 Love is summer weather,
Love is all that's bright on earth,
 Joy and hope together.
 If I love him and he love me,
 Nor he nor I can weary be.

OSWAROFF.

Where didst thou learn that little foolish song?

OLGA.

Oh ! from a bird, 'twas warbled in my ear.

(*Sings*) A little bird so blithe and gay
 Sang out to me this roundelay.

OSWAROFF.

I must be gone. I tarry from my work.
Kiss thine old father.

OLGA (*kissing him*).

Yes : one, and two, and three.
A lucky number, or I would give more.

[*Exit* OSWAROFF.]

(*Sings*) A little bird so blithe and gay
 Sang out to me this roundelay :
 The golden sun shines bright by day,
 The silver moon by night,

Whilst morn and eve, the twinkling stars
Drive through the skies their glittering cars,
 For Heaven is love and light.
Oh, little bird ! dear little bird !
Come, tell to me all thou hast heard,
 When, soaring in the heavens above,
 Sun, moon, and stars sang songs of love.

A little bird so blithe and gay
Sang out to me this roundelay :
The buds are bursting from each spray,
 Awoke by April showers,
Whilst greedy bees fly everywhere,
Now up, now down, now here, now there,
 And kiss the blushing flowers.
Oh, little bird ! dear little bird !
Come, tell to me all thou hast heard,
 When, soaring in the heavens above,
 All nature sang sweet songs of love.

Oh would I were a little bird, that I
Might sing to him, and he think all the while
It was not I, whilst he still thought of me. [*Exit.*

SCENE III.—*Moscow. Room in the Kremlin.*

DMITRI. MARINA.

MARINA.

'Tis folly to talk thus. Thou art the Czar !

DMITRI (*mockingly*).

True, my Marina. Dmitri, Ivan's son.

MARINA.

Then show these boors that Dmitri, when provoked,

Is not less terrible than was his sire.

DMITRI.

It was the stalwart arms of these same boors
Which placed me—aye, and thee—upon a throne.

MARINA.

How ? What ? Have placed thee ! Who have
placed thee—where ?

Oh ! my dear lord, the work was all thine own.
The throne was thine. By right. By God's decree.

If thou hadst aid, it came from my fair land ;
Afforded thee when yet a mother's heart
Was turned to stone against the child she bore,
And only softened to a Czar's embrace.

DMITRI.

And wouldst thou love me were I not a Czar,
Most sweet Marina ?

MARINA.

Sir ! did I profess
That I would do so ? Was it not agreed
From the beginning, that my hand was thine
When thou hadst gained, and not before, the crown ?

DMITRI.

A right royal love !

MARINA.

The nobler, being royal.
I could not love a poor mean, clayformed thing,
Crawling along some dull and dreary path,
Who, like a glow-worm, shed so pale a light,
That it but served to show—what else unseen—
The insignificance from whence it came.

DMITRI.

How can I shine when thou art standing by?

MARINA.

Because thou art the sun, round which all moves,
And I but borrow from thee some small light.
It is because that I would wish to shine,
And still shine brighter, that I urge thee on
To add fresh lustre to your jewelled crown.

DMITRI.

My jewelled crown! Oh! hateful, weary word.

MARINA.

Yet you have worn it but a moment's space.

DMITRI.

'Tis I have worn it. When the quarry falls,
The zest is lost we felt in the pursuit.
I would begin again, seek something new
To hang my life on. Now all seems so firm,
My brain is giddy for the want of whirl.

MARINA.

And this, before your task is well begun?

DMITRI.

How so ?

MARINA.

Because to reign, is not to rule.
The crown is a mere bauble, if it bring
No power to him who wears it. You must be
Supreme in Russia. Drive forth from the Court
All those who have the insolence to act
As if the right to rule, was theirs, not yours.

DMITRI.

I owe them gratitude : they are my friends.

MARINA.

Kings have no friends, they have but parasites :
Friendship, forsooth, demands equality.
We may be patrons, and descend to praise,
But there we stop ; men serve us, 'tis our due,
And we permit this service, theirs the gain—
They wish for honour and we give it them.

DMITRI.

Come, speak more plainly, what wouldst have me
do?

I know at first that women rarely sa

Just what they mean. Some little thought lies hid.
Expound it to me, my fair councillor.

MARINA.

Thou art the Czar ; and yet but Czar in name,
So long as men like Schouiski—insolent—
Dare speak such words as he hath spoke to thee.
Advice like his means treason, my dear lord.

DMITRI.

He has a right to speak, won by his sword.

MARINA.

Let a sword teach him, better—not to speak.

DMITRI.

I hate the thought of bloodshed.

MARINA.

So do I :

But when 'tis needed for our corporal weal,
We shed our own. Much more then, when the State
Is too plethoric, should we let it flow.

[Enter BASMANOFF hastily.]

BASMANOFF.

Excuse me that I enter unannounced
To the royal presence.

DMITRI.

The best excuse
Is the importance of the news you bring.

BASMANOFF.

I dare not speak it, Sire, to other ears.

DMITRI.

From the Czarina I have naught to hide.
'Take courage, man, and speak out this bad news—
For by thy paleness such I know it is.

BASMANOFF.

I hardly can find words—so scant my breath—
Oppressed by horror and my headlong haste.

DMITRI.

Ill news finds speedy messengers. Come, speak.

BASMANOFF.

Alas! in Moscow treason stalks abroad,
And traitors garbed as friends now seek your life.

MARINA.

The Czar's! Base miscreants! It is sacrilege.

DMITRI.

Psha ! Psha ! Basmanoff. When men sit on
thrones

Such news is hardly news. But who these friends ?
At least 'twere well to take them off the roll
And add them to the number of our foes.

BASMANOFF (*handing a paper*).

These are the chief conspirators, with proofs
Which show their implication, void of doubt.

DMITRI (*reading*).

How now ? The Schouiski ! Vasili ! my friend !

MARINA.

Did I not say so ? Who was right, my lord ?

DMITRI.

And does he know that thou hast gained these
proofs ?

BASMANOFF.

They were seized in his presence ; for I dared
To act without authority in this.
There was no time. The plot was on its eve,
And who can say what one lost hour had done.

DMITRI.

I hate both traitors and conspirators,
But hate still more to have to deal with them.
Have none escaped?

BASMANOFF.

Not one. We hold them all.
Our action was too sudden and well planned.

MARINA.

Indeed, my lord, we owe thee many thanks.

DMITRI.

And something more substantial than mere thanks.
I wish this world were made up of rewards,
And would revolve without its punishments :
For things sometimes get put so out of place,
That puzzled justice picks up right for wrong.
I cannot understand these ill-starred men.
What would they have ? No sooner do they gain
A chief of their own choice, than they rebel
Against the exercise of that same power
Which they themselves had raised. Aye, so it is
With all of us ! Mere children after all,
Less caring for our toys, than for the sport

Of breaking them, in token of our strength.
Yes, we are children !—puppets, moved by strings—
The secret forces which compel the world—
Pulled in the background by a hidden hand ;
Whilst in our pride, we think that every jerk
Is but the action of our own free will.
It is because I feel it to be thus,
That even traitors hardly raise mine ire.
But not the less, Basmanoff, will I strike,
When striking is the part I have to play.
Go ! Bring the matter to a speedy end.

[*Exit* BASMANOFF.

MARINA.

Well said, my lord ; and better still when done.

DMITRI.

Marina, peace ! If it were possible
For thee to err, I pray thee let it be
Upon the side where Mercy takes her stand.
It is the birthright of your sex to hold
Our chafing tempers with a silken rein.

MARINA.

Or prick on laggards with the pointed spur
Which nature gives us in our sharper wit,
For woman's folly is the work of man.

DMITRI.

If man work woman's folly, then indeed
He pays for it, for woman moulds the man,
And on God's metal sets the current stamp.

MARINA.

Since when, my lord, have you held these ideas?
'Twas different, methinks, when first we met.

DMITRI.

What said I then?

MARINA.

Have you forgotten? Words,
Sweetened by flattery, whispered in the ear
In lisping accents full of tenderness.

DMITRI (*excitedly*).

Am I so changed, Marina? Ah, 'tis sad!
But sadder were it if I could not change,
And change, and change, and still go on and on,
Until I ceased to be myself in change.
Myself! The being that I most do hate,
Yet hating thus am bound to with a spell,
Which bids me love the thing I most do loathe.

'Tis horrible to live thus closely linked
With iron fetters to a phantom past.
Would I could trample it beneath my feet,
And stamp out every trace of shape and form
From——

(Restraining himself and resuming his usual tone.)

There, my Marina ! How dost like *that* mood ?
Somewhat too tragic ? Ah ! but love would cloy
If it were only fed with sugared sweets.

MARINA.

Is this a time for such wild jests, my lord,
When treason stands detected at the gate ?

DMITRI.

It is this treason, makes my words so wild.
The bitter thought, that friends are friends no more ;
That in my hand I hold a score of lives
Once freely perilled on the battlefield,
When by my side these men fought for my cause,
Now sets my brain afire. Wherefore this blood ?
This holocaust of victims ? To what God—
Or demon is it—are they offered up ?
Is there no peace, no resting-place for kings ?
No shelter for them from these raging storms ?

MARINA.

Be calm, I do beseech thee.

DMITRI.

Good advice,
Which I will follow, when I need a mask.

MARINA.

But enmity may twist the sense of words
Spoken in passion.

DMITRI.

Were they o'erheard
By those who would so twist them. But a wife
Need not deter us from frank utterance—
When we are certain that we hold her love —
Or that her *interests* are one with ours.
Come, now ! thou layest claim to quicker wit,
Pray tell me this—what I have often asked
Of my own heart, or brain, or spleen, may be—
It matters little that I do not know—
Which acts as mainspring of intelligence.
Tell me, Marina : by what right or law
Can one man place himself so far above
His fellow-men, that they must bow them down
In abject thralldom, hang upon his words,

Anticipate his needs, and curb each thought
Which might produce free action—chief of crimes?
I fain would ask, is it by right divine
That the sweet harmony which nature makes,
Out of earth's ceaseless, ever-changing sounds,
Is turned to the dull echo of one voice,
No matter how discordant are its tones?
And mine is now that voice, and if be heard
A murmur only in another key,
The cry is raised of treason, and a law—
Made by myself, and for myself alone—
Awards a penalty, which makes me feel
As Cain, first seeing flow a brother's blood.
Enough, I cannot do it! Schouiski lives!

MARINA.

It is the Czar—'tis Dmitri, then—who dies.

DMITRI (*thoughtfully*).

Must it be so? 'tis either he or I?
The end in either case would be the same.
Blood must be shed. Wherefore should it be mine?
I the least ready, maybe—now—to die.
To die! To leave this world, with all its joys,
Its strifes, its victories, e'en its defeats—
For all seems sweetened in the face of death.

To die ! To draw one breath of this pure air,
And then to pass away, who dares say where—
Mayhap to some foul region, where despair
Feeds on the breath of misery and sighs:
A region filled with shapes unknown to light,
Impalpable, yet seen—invisible, yet felt,
Filling the soul with such a sense of dread,
That naught on earth can parallel its woe.

(After a pause.)

No ! 'Twere rebellion against Fate, for me
Thus to pass hasty judgment on myself.
I am not ripe for death. I am resolved.
Whose is the fault ? If heads *must* fall, they must ;
But it is Schouiski, not myself, who dies.

MARINA.

Oh, my dear liege ! now speaks again the Czar.

DMITRI.

Yes ! my fair consort, in the crystal cup
Which pleasure offers, still are copious draughts ;
Till I have quaffed them, I decide to live.
Come, let us drive away these vexing thoughts,
And in a round of revels, masks, and feasts
Charm every rebel sense. Old care shall fly
Before the jocund shouts of mirth and joy ;

F

Whilst pleasure, hand in hand with soft-eyed love,
Shall type on earth the bliss of Heaven above.

[Enter Attendant.]

What now ?

ATTENDANT.

The Minister of Justice, Sire,
Awaits without and craves an audience.

DMITRI.

Admit him to our presence. *[Exit Attendant.]*

This man comes

To bring us back again to vulgar thoughts,
From our poetic visions. Perhaps it were
More fitting that he found me here alone—
To do his bidding—I, who am his prince.

MARINA.

Farewell, my lord, and may the holy saints
Preserve you stedfast in your present mind. *[Exit.]*

DMITRI (*aside*).

The saints, I fear, would have enough to do,
Had they to keep me straight as well as you.

[Enter Minister of Justice.]

SCENE IV.—*The Same.*

DMITRI. MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

Most gracious Prince, I have received command,
Through my Lord Basmanoff, to bring you this.

[*Presents a paper.*]

DMITRI (*reads*).

‘In accordance with the law, and the Imperial will,
are hereby ordered to immediate execution the hereunder
mentioned persons, charged with, and found guilty of,
High Treason to the State, and of impiously contemplated
acts against the sacred person of His Imperial Majesty
the Czar, our Sovereign Lord and Most Potent Master.’

Wherefore this haste—need it be done so soon?

MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

A prompt example better marks such crimes.

DMITRI.

It is too hasty. I will give some pause,
Some little space. My lord, were you so placed,
Methinks you would but choose to have some time

Wherein to try and make your peace with God.
It is the body we would kill; the soul
Should meet with gentler treatment at our hands.
'Judge as ye would be judged,'—mysterious words
Pregnant of meaning. Yes! he shall have time.
Three rising suns from this I give to him,
Then, ere the fourth gives light unto the day,
Let Justice have its course, and Schouiski die.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

Your pardon, Sire. Schouiski stands not alone :
His son and some score others share his crime.

DMITRI.

A score of lives scratched out by one poor pen !
No, my good sir ! One head shall ransom all,
For clemency must temper all our acts.
Alexis Schouiski and the rest are free.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

Your Majesty would give them liberty ?

DMITRI.

Would give them what? I did not catch the
word.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

Sire, it was liberty.

DMITRI.

No marvel, then,
That dulled perception could not seize on it,
So seldom does the word strike on my ear.
Yes! It is *liberty* I give to them.
A gift beyond all price. A flawless gem
Reflecting rays of light to earth from Heaven,
To guide our footsteps in the tortuous paths
Which lead man onward, towards the unreach'd goal
Of human progress. Without liberty,
Man would but grope around a prison'd space
With downcast eyes, not daring to look up,
Or speak great thoughts, or coin new ideas,
Or search for truth, or lay bare hidden lies,
Or change a worn out system for a new,
Or wrestle with the tyranny of wrong,
And strike the fetters off the necks of slaves.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

I would not for the world the people heard
Such words as now your Majesty has spoke.
For even as it is they think too much,
And liberty and licence are akin.

DMITRI.

Ha ! Ha ! my sage Lord Judge. It matters not
Whilst we enjoy the liberty to rule,
What they may think. They are too ignorant
To see the power which they might wield at will.
And well it is so : for, if they would plant
The tree of liberty, its stem has roots
Which oft strike deepest when made moist with blood.
Ha ! that reminds me. I take up your time,
And time, my lord, means service to the State.
Keep all the prisoners in ward but one ;
Give me the warrant ! (*signs.*) There ! my part is
done ;
God speed thee, my good sir, in doing yours.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

It shall be carried out with all due care.

DMITRI.

And with due gentleness, I pray thee, too.

[Exit Minister of Justice.]

Now it is done, I do not feel the deed
Weigh half so heavily as the idea.
The thought of Schouiski's head laid on the block
Had something in it made my blood run cold.

That has quite gone ; and if I feel at all,
It is a sense which almost mounts to joy,
To think that I have thrown some twenty lives
Into the scales to balance one poor corpse.
Yes ! it is easier than I thought, to write
The single word which takes away a life.
Away with silly scruples ; after all
Upon the battlefield some thousands fall.
When made a question of arithmetic,
This sin of mine would seem extremely small.

[*Exit.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Moscow. Exterior of Cathedral in the Sabornai Ploshshad. A great crowd surrounds the entrance. Soldiers guard the approach. A group of spectators in foreground, amongst whom*

VANOVITCH. IVAN and NADIA OTRÉPIEF. LOUSHA.

VANOVITCH.

Hast heard the news?

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

We have but just now come.

What is it, sir?

VANOVITCH.

No less than a foul plot.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

The saints forbid it is against the Czar.

VANOVITCH.

Alack, it is ! but, thanks be to the saints,
The tricksters had a traitor in their camp,
Who brought the matter to Basmanoff's ear.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

How heard you this?

VANOVITCH.

From one who is his steward,
And had the story from his noble lips.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Who were the wretches?

VANOVITCH.

I scarce dare to speak
Of them as guilty. Men we all most love :
The princely Schouiski standing at their head.

LOUSHA (*who has caught the last words*).

What of the princely Schouiski, may I ask ?

VANOVITCH.

No more, nor less, than they are ruined men,
Accused and sentenced by the law to die.

LOUSHA.

Alack ! A little heart will break for this.

VANOVITCH.

And mend itself again ere many days.

LOUSHA.

You do not know it. I, sir, felt its throb
At the first moment of its new-born life.
And well I know that it has beat since then,
Within a bosom pure and chaste as snow.

VANOVITCH.

Your mistress has a faithful friend, good dame,
And that proves something. Is this heart then given
To one of those I named, now doomed to die ?

LOUSHA.

Sir, I have said, already, far too much.
Excuse me for this prating, I must go. *[Exit.*

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

A faithful servant, truly. Whose is she ?

VANOVITCH

I rather think the merchant Oswaroff's.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Is he from Kief?

VANOVITCH.

He is. But lately come.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF (*to her husband*).

It is my cousin. Let us go to him.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

All in good time, my wife. First let us see
This noble sight ; it will not keep us long.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

His little Olga ! Doubtless she has grown
Into a woman since we saw her last.
(*To Vanovitch.*) Hast ever seen her, sir ? my cousin's
child.

VANOVITCH.

No, madam, I have not. But I have heard
That she for beauty is beyond all praise ;
And beauty never fails to catch the eye
Of some young noble.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Ah ! I pity her.
These rich young men are all so light of love.

VANOVITCH.

The Czar himself is not immaculate :
He sets the fashion : but then he is Czar,
And turns to honour what were else deemed shame.
There are strange stories—strangest still the last.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Sir, it is dangerous to hear reports.
I never care to hear them. 'Tis my plan.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

But I should like to hear what rumour says.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Chut ! wife, 'twere safer far to close thine ears.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

What danger can there be in hearing this ?
(*To VANOVITCH.*) Pray tell me what it is that people
say.

VANOVITCH.

Oh ! nothing. Idle gossip. Naught but this :
Our right royal Czar is not great Ivan's son ;
But Youri Otrépief, a perjured monk
Who sold his soul to gain the demon's aid.

Of course I do not credit this—it would
Be treason if I did so—and I wish
To live in safety. But

(Looking at NADIA, who is trembling violently)

I fear you are ill.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Sir, was it Youri Otrépief, a monk?

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Oh! husband, husband! Take me from this
place.

How terrible this is! my heart will burst.

VANOVITCH.

I see I speak to those who love the Czar.
I, like yourselves, am pained by what I hear;
For one ne'er knows what danger lurks beneath
Such idle words. What matters it to us.
Besides, a mother ought to know her son,
And the Royal Marpha never had a doubt.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Didst see them enter?

VANOVITCH.

Yes. They passed quite close.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

And will they come as near on their return ?

VANOVITCH.

No better place to see them. Stand by me.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Was Marpha with them ?

VANOVITCH.

Aye, sir, that she was.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

How looks she now ?

VANOVITCH.

Much aged, and ill at ease.

She walked with downcast eyes, feeble and pale ;

And on her left, a little holding back,

Yet full of haughtiness and regal grace,

Swept the Czarina. Hush ! methinks I hear

A stir within. Yes ! stand quite close. They come.

Hurrah ! Huzzah ! Long life to our good Czar.

SCENE II.—*The Same.*

(*The doors of the Cathedral are thrown open. A procession sweeps down the steps, and passes close to where IVAN and NADIA OTRÉPIEF stand. DMITRI appears between, but a little in advance of, MARPHA and the CZARINA. As he approaches the spot where IVAN and NADIA are standing, the latter utters a loud shriek, and falls senseless to the ground. DMITRI stops and turns towards her.*)

DMITRI (*to BASMANOFF*).

'Tis some poor soul too weak from age to stand
So long thus waiting. See to her, my lord.
Here is my purse. I give her in thy charge ;
I would not on a holy day like this
That her grey hairs should suffer for our sake.
(*Whispers*) In this lies life and death—see well to it,
I cannot have *two* mothers, Basmanoff.
The air of Moscow is too strong for those
Who breathe it newly. Let the air be changed
For these good people, and with least delay.
(*To Marpha*) I crave your pardon, my royal mother,
thus

To let my thoughts turn from you. But I know
You will forgive me, some slight care bestowed,
On one who suffers for her love to us.
We will move on.

(Bowing to the people, who redouble their shouts.)

I thank ye, my good friends.

*[The procession moves on, leaving BASMANOFF with
IVAN and NADIA OTRÉPIEF. Attendants stand
aloof, having been waived back by BASMANOFF.
IVAN kneels on one knee and supports NADIA.]*

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Alack ! alack ! The shock has been too great.

BASMANOFF.

It is a swoon, which soon will pass away.
The Czar has charged me take you in my care.
Where is your home ? Ah ! see, she opes her eyes.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

I knew him. It was he—it was my son.
Ah ! has he gone ? was it then but a dream ?

BASMANOFF.

Hush, my good woman ! Now your brain is weak
You must keep silence. (*To Attendant*) Sirrah, lend
your aid
To bring this worthy couple to their home.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Excuse me, noble sir, with many thanks,
There is no need ; my wife will soon be strong.

BASMANOFF.

I must obey the orders of the Czar.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

The Czar ! Oh, I am mad ! Youri the Czar !

BASMANOFF.

Alas ! you see she is not yet herself.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Alack ! I know not if I am myself.
It must be witchcraft which makes men thus change
Into strange shapes.

G

BASMANOFF.

Excitement, nothing more,
Which often fills the over-heated brain
With idle fancies. When the fit is o'er
We cannot think of them without a smile.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF (*laughing wildly*).

Oh, yes ! it is a joke. Youri the Czar !
And with an Empress-mother by his side !
Ha ! ha ! Oh, I must laugh or choke with grief
To think that I have suckled such a son.

BASMANOFF (*who has endeavoured to silence her, to Attendants*).

Her mind has gone ; carry her gently off.
(*To IVAN*) Come, honest friend, and give her your best
care :
With rest and quiet all will soon be well.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Take me from this ! Take me I care not where,
If it be far away—to hide ourselves,
From this strange shame which has befallen us.

• [*Exeunt IVAN and NADIA, the latter supported by
IVAN, assisted by BASMANOFF and Attendants.*]

SCENE III.—*The Same.*

VANOVITCH (*who comes forward from behind a fountain, where he had stood concealed*). LOUSHA.

VANOVITCH.

Now drop from off mine eyes the scales of doubt,
And Dmitri stands before them as he is.
I thought him false before, but now I know
The very source from which his falsehood flows.

[LOUSHA *enters*.

LOUSHA.

Sir, it was you I talked with not long since ?

VANOVITCH.

Why do you ask ?

LOUSHA.

Because, sir, I would gain
A clearer knowledge of some words you spoke
About the Schouiski, and of this sad plot.

VANOVITCH.

Your mistress—does she know her lover's fate ?

LOUSHA.

Alas ! sir, no. I could not bring myself
To speak of it, for, though I tried, I failed.
She was too happy in herself, to see
The rebel tears which streamed from these old eyes.
So I have hastened back to glean some hope—
Some single spark that I might breathe upon—
To cast a glimmer o'er this dismal tale.
Can you not give it ?

VANOVITCH.

There is no room for hope.
Their lives are forfeit ; but their cause is just,
What was a rumour has become a fact.
Had you but stayed some minutes you had heard
What I scarce dare now tell you.

LOUSHA.

Sir, believe
That you can trust me. Tell me what you know.

VANOVITCH,

Dost bear the old man and his wife in mind,
With whom we spoke ?

LOUSHA.

Yes, sir, I do, quite well.

VANOVITCH.

Hast heard the name of Otrépief, perchance ?

LOUSHA.

My master has a cousin of that name.¹
Her son . . .

VANOVITCH.

Became Gregorio, a monk ?

LOUSHA.

A roysterer before he took the vows ;
Who loved to madness, it is said, the maid
My master married—now a saint above.
I have not heard him spoken of for years,
And hence had always deemed that he was dead.

VANOVITCH.

This scapegrace of a son—this monk—still lives.
You would have seen him had you stayed by us.
As true as I stand here, that monk is now—
A secret in your ear (*whispers*)—I swear to it.

LOUSHA.

What, Youri Otrépief ! Ye Blessed Saints !
I see it all. But, sir, what can be done
To save the lives of these most noble men ?

VANOVITCH.

Enough for us to look to our own heads.
My worthy woman, these are troublous times,
When prudent people have the fewest words.
I must move on. Of course you will not speak
Of what you've heard, or say from whence it came.

[*Exit.*]

LOUSHA.

Oh, my poor child ! I see but little hope :
But there may be some way unknown to me
To save your lover. Should he die, alas !
You will weep out your life ; whilst I, too old
To die of grief, must linger on alone.
Heaven grant me courage ! I must tell thee all.
Though not of Otrépief—'twere dangerous. [*Exit.*]

SCENE IV.—*Moscow. Room in a Prison.*VASILI SCHOUISKI. *Afterwards* GAOLER.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Another day, and then—an end to all
Just at the moment when I most would live.
Still full of vigour, with no weariness

To make death seem but worn-out nature's sleep.
Struck down, too, when the future seemed to bear
So rich a promise : all just in my grasp !
And now, how few the hours which yet remain
Of that brief life, whose term is shortly out.
It is a dream ! Ah ! if I had not slept,
The viper Basmanoff had never crept
Into my bosom : I had seen his fangs.
Just Heaven, where is thy justice ! when such men
As these are found to rule the destinies
Of states and peoples, making all things work
To one sole end—the greatness of themselves ?
But shall I fall alone ? At least in that
There were some cause for comfort—I could die
With resignation if my son were saved.
Oh, my Alexis ! All the pangs of death
Are centred in the thought that we must part,
For some unmeasured time, from those we love ;
To meet again, 'tis said. But when ? and where ?
And under what conditions ? Shall we meet
Those whom we leave behind, in such a form
As will recall them to remembrance ?
Or clad in some strange garb, all changed by age,
By pain, or sickness ; worn and travel-stained,
With scarce a feature of the face we loved ?
All seems so vague when we would reason out

A something tangible, to fill the void
Which lies beyond the moment when we cease
To have the sense of being, man calls 'life.'
Ah ! were it not for the belief that God,
Dealing with us in some mysterious way,
So guides our erring footsteps thro' the paths
Which cross this tangled labyrinth, the world,
That we can gain the blessed goal, and rest—
Despair would seize on us. O God ! great God !
The past has gone—blot out its many sins ;
The fleeting moments that I live are Thine—
Let them be sanctified alone to Thee.

[*Enter GAOLER.*

GAOLER.

Take heart, my lord ! be cheered, I bring you
food,
And good news with it : you will see your son.

VASILI SCHOUISKI (*eagerly*).

Oh ! when, my friend ? I pray thee trifle not
With the few moments I can yet call mine,
For hours are turned to seconds, when the span
Of our poor lives stands stark before our eyes.

GAOLER.

My lord, the news I bring you is quite true,
Though not intended it should reach your ear.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

And on my son what sentence has been passed ?
Oh, tell me. Dost thou know ? Hast thou a son ?
There is an agony in this suspense.

GAOLER.

You will not know his sentence till you stand
Prepared to meet the judgment of the law.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

But saidst thou not I was to see my son ?

GAOLER.

At the last moment—on the day you die.
Take comfort : all must die, none have a choice ;
And death is only terrible to those
Who dare not face it. I can speak to this,
For I'm a soldier, only newly brought
Into a trade I have no stomach for.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

My honest friend, I would not have thee think
That I shall tremble at the sight of death.
I might perhaps do so were I less myself,
Or racked and tortured by some dire disease ;

But coming as it does when I possess
Each faculty which serves to give us sway
Over such senses, as are rebels, when
The will is weak, and can no longer rule,
Death stands before me, and I feel no fear
Of death itself, though loth, maybe, to die,
So far as dying is good-bye to all
Round which my heart-strings have entwined themselves.

GAOLER.

Now, my lord, eat. You must keep up your
strength ;
An empty belly fills the mind with fear—
At least I know that it is so with me,
And half-starved soldiers seldom gain the day.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

I thank thee for this kindness : I will eat,
But somewhat later. I would be alone.
Here is a trifle for thee.

GAOLER.

Noble sir,
Should there be anything that I can do
In my small way, to show my gratitude,
I stand your servant.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

When you next may come,
If I should sleep, awake me not. Good night !

GAOLER.

The Blessed Saints be with you, my good lord!
When all is lost we can but turn to them. [*Exit.*

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

When all is lost ! How true that is to life.
We turn us to the beacon in the storm,
Oft past unheeded by in days of calm,
And learn to know its value, when, alas !
Around their prey the hungry breakers roar.

SCENE V.—*Moscow. Room in OSWAROFF'S House.*OSWAROFF. IVAN *and* NADIA OTRÉPIEF.OSWAROFF (*holding an open letter in his hand*).

Therefore it is, that you are in my charge,
And I am ordered to return to Kief,
And keep you safe in custody when there

(*Reads*) 'As persons dangerous to be at large.
And at your peril see no foolish words
Proceed from either, 'gainst the Czar or State.'—
Banished from Moscow for no deed of mine :
There sounds the knell of my prosperity.
I wish, good cousin, you had kept your tongue
Tight held between your teeth, ere you had spoke
Of me or mine.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

My cousin, I but said,
In answer to the question, that I knew
No soul in Moscow but an uncle's son,
Who was the merchant Oswaroff, from Kief.

OSWAROFF.

Who, then, first spoke of Youri ?

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

'Twas my wife.
She spoke of him when waking from her swoon.

OSWAROFF.

The tangled skein is being fast unwound.
Doubtless my Olga's banishment was planned,
To add to all Alexis has to bear—
Should he escape with life—a sharper pang.

But trouble follows trouble, just as hawks
Fly in the track of those who sight the prey.
Now, at this moment, when we should set out,
Olga has gone, and gone I know not where.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Had she been told ?

OSWAROFF.

She had. With foolish haste
Our servant, Lousha, told her she had heard
That some great danger threatened him she loved ;
When, with one look to Heaven, she hurried forth,
Unheeding all the words with which I tried
To give her comfort. It was passing strange
To see, in one so gentle as she is,
Such stern resolve as shot forth from her eyes.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

Perhaps she will throw herself at Youri's feet,
And sue for pardon.

OSWAROFF.

No ! By all the Saints
I would she died first. Kneel at Youri's feet !
A wretch so steeped in infamy and vice !
Made what he is through perjury and crime !

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Ah ! woe is me that he should be my son.
Had he but died I could have mourned for him,
And yearned to join him in the silent tomb.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

The Saints know best. 'Tis they have raised him
thus.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

It is the action of the Evil One,
Thou foolish man ! Bethink thee of his soul.
Oh, wretched mother ! Still more wretched son.
[*Weeps.*

OSWAROFF.

Forgive me, cousin, if I gave thee pain,
When thinking only of my selfish griefs.
There is no mortal, who is wholly vile,
And man's own heart should teach him charity.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Ah ! never knew a mother less a son
Than I did Youri—I can scarcely feel
I am his mother. So it ever was.
When quite a child, he had so many shapes,

And changed so often, that from day to day
He seemed to grow to something different.
One day he was all suppleness ; the next,
Nothing could move or bend him. Yet his heart
Was not all hardness. I have seen him weep—
Not childish tears, but such as grown men shed—
When grief has forced the flood-gates of their eyes.
Then he became a monk, and left his home—
And in short space, the rumour of his death.
Would he had died ere he had come to this !
No, No ! with all his crimes, he is my son !
However black his crimes, he is my son !
Surely if human love can outlive sin,
God's greater love will temper punishment.
Oh, my poor son ! He had a tender heart.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

How has he shown it ? not to you or me.
With all his riches he has left us poor.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Husband, bethink thee, all this seeming wealth
Is one of Satan's snares—the deadliest.
Oh ! that he were a beggar in the street,
Starving, but truthful, clad in filthy rags—

That I might clasp him to this breast and feel
It was an honest man that I held there.

IVAN OTRÉPIEF.

He wears a crown : methinks that is a cause
For some small comfort.

NADIA OTRÉPIEF.

Peace ! poor foolish man,
I blush to hear thee. Hast thou lost all shame ?

OSWAROFF (*who has been walking up and down in
deep thought*).

Good people, silence ! It were wise for both
To let this secret be inviolate.

[*Enter LOUSHA.*

(*To LOUSHA*) What, all alone ? Thou hast not found
my child ?

LOUSHA.

It is at her behest that I am here.
She sent me back to tell thee she is safe,
And will return ere many hours have past.

OSWAROFF.

What ? Hours ! From whence ? Just Heaven !
Where has she gone ?

LOUSHA.

To see the Czar, and save the Schouiskis' life.

OSWAROFF.

I must go to her.

LOUSHA.

It will be in vain
To seek to change her purpose—it is fixed.
She is, too, in safe keeping.

OSWAROFF.

Safe with whom?

LOUSHA.

Some secret friends of Schouiski's, through whose
aid
She hopes to see the Czar when time may suit.
These count upon her beauty, as the key
Which shall unlock what mercy lies confined
Within the stony prison of his heart.

OSWAROFF.

Lousha, my cloak and staff ; I must be gone.
Have all in readiness by my return
For our departure. (*To Nadia*) Nadia, let her know.

H

All that has happened. But, beyond these walls
No sound or syllable to living soul.
I shall be back again when Olga comes,
Without her never ! See that all is done,
For we should start from this at break of day. [*Exit.*

SCENE VI.—*A corridor in the Palace.*

OLGA. (*Later*) DMITRI. BASMANOFF.

OLGA.

This is the spot where I must hide myself.
How strange it is ! yet, can I call it strange
That even here, I find the help of friends
Who love Alexis?—Cautious timid friends
Who shrink in terror from a prince's frown.
But love gives courage ! Still, you foolish heart !
Beat not so wildly with these racking throbs.
My brain is burning—hot with phrensied thoughts,
Which hurry onward in a giddy maze,
And leave the chasing words, but partly framed,
To die upon the lips, half-uttered sounds.
I must be calmer, for the time draws nigh—
Ye Saints assist me ! (*clock strikes*) Hark ! the hour
The Czar should pass this way. Why tremble thus !

A Czar is but a man, why should I fear?
Oh heart, be strong and help me to success.

[DMITRI and BASMANOFF enter by a side door, and
pass along the corridor.

OLGA (*rushing forward and throwing herself at DMITRI'S
feet*).

I have a prayer I would make to the Czar.

DMITRI (*starting back*).

Maiden, I am the Czar. But who art thou?

OLGA.

A suppliant for justice. Oh, my Lord,
It is not pardon, for there is no guilt.
Believe me, there is none. I know his heart :
It has no room for treason. It is filled
With naught but loyalty—and love. In truth,
I ought to know it ; for, oh Sire, that heart
Is as mine own, and when it stops I die.

DMITRI.

But I would know, fair maiden, who *thou* art ?

OLGA.

One far too humble to deserve a thought
When danger threatens him—so good, so great,
And all too noble to commit a crime.

H 2

DMITRI.

Speak of yourself, and tell me—quick ! your name ?

BASMANOFF.

I think I can speak for her, Sire. 'Tis said
That to the daughter of one Oswaroff
The younger Schouiski, in an idle mood,
Had vowed such vows as men are prone to swear,
When they would win the hearts of simple maids.

OLGA (*rising*).

You dare !—and in the presence of the Czar—
To slander a fair fame ? Oh, Sire ! this man
Knows not Alexis, but sees all the world
In the black mirror of his own dark soul.
Such words, forsooth, as his false lips may swear
Might win the favour of the weak and vain,
But Olga Oswaroff could only love,
Where truth and honour had a living shrine.

DMITRI (*to* BASMANOFF).

My lord, I will not keep thee, I would have
Some secret converse with this bright-eyed maid.

[*Exit* BASMANOFF.

(*To* OLGA) Thy speech has echoes in it of a voice

Which conjures up a spirit from the past,
And clothes it with the form which you now wear.
Just as you stand before me, she once stood—
A thing to worship and to glorify—
Filling the air with sweetness. Even now
It seemed to me as if each word you spoke
Was wafted to me on her fragrant breath.
You said your name was Olga?—'tis most strange.
Olga, you said?

OLGA.

Sire, 'twas my mother's name.

DMITRI.

Your mother, then, is dead?

OLGA.

When I was born
The angels carried her pure soul to Heaven.

DMITRI.

This earth is no fit place for saints :
And yet she graced it. She who gave you birth
Was Olga Ostonoff before she wed?

OLGA.

That was my mother's name.

DMITRI.

I knew her well.

Heard she had married—next that she had died;
Wept—aye, child—wept ! And thou art Olga's child?
Give me thine hand. It feels to me as hers ;
There is a magic in its touch which wakes
The slumbering memories of bye-gone years.
Let me look at thee, Olga. Tell me, child:
What was the little prayer ye prayed to me?
I heard the sounds but did not catch the words,
Or heard the words but did not catch the sense,
For all my thoughts had wandered—years away.
What is the weighty matter brings thee here ?

OLGA.

i cannot speak it standing. Let me kneel.
[*Endeavours to kneel.*]

DMITRI (*preventing her*).

Thy mother's child shall never kneel to me.
Come, sit down by my side, as she once sat.
[*Sits down.*]

OLGA (*timidly*).

Sire !

DMITRI.

Call me not Sire. It is a word for Courts
And those whose lips are tutored slaves of form.
But thine, my Olga, I would have quite free
To speak each thought, as it upsprings and flows
From the pure fountain of thy virgin heart.
I would not have thee fettered by those chains,
However gilded, which mere courtiers wear.
I would be as a friend—a more than friend—
For art thou not the child of her I loved ;
Aye, Olga, loved—and *love* though she is dead.
What is this suit of thine? If it be one
Dmitri can grant, 'tis granted ere 'tis spoke.

OLGA.

Oh, Sir, if you have loved—if it be true
That you still love the saint, who e'en in Heaven
Must weep to see the cruel deeds which men
Do on this happy earth, so blessed by God—
Then, sir, be more than merciful, be just ;
Open the prison doors, strike off the chains
From those whose crime has been to have false
friends,
Speak but the word—give freedom with their lives ;

What is mere life without it? Set them free :
I beg for all, but most, for him, I love.

DMITRI.

Of whom dost speak?

OLGA.

Oh ! must I give it words?
But wherefore need I blush to speak his name ?
Alexis Schouiski, Sire ! Justice for him.
Upon his innocence I stake my life—
Justice for him, and all who lie condemned.

DMITRI.

What if we make a compact. He is free
And saves his father's life—but on these terms :
That with his freedom he receives a gift
Even more precious, if his love be true.
He shall be pardoned, when he marries you,
His father only if his proud will bend,
To join your hands and give his free consent.

OLGA.

I would not make a purchase of his life
Save with mine own. Oh, let the gift be free.

I would not mar his fortunes, or constrain
The freedom of his choice, or buy his love.

DMITRI.

I somewhat doubt this love. To me it seems,
The Church had crowned thee as his bride ere this,
Had he the ardour which belongs to love.

OLGA.

You do him wrong. Delay came not from him.
I would not wed unless his father gave
His free consent ; such, too, the will of mine.
No lot so humble but it has its pride,
And love which has no pride is scarcely love.
I would not have my husband's cheek made red
When malice whispered that his love was bought,

DMITRI.

A fitting answer—spoken from the heart—
As all words would be in a truthful world :
But as the world now is—made up of shams—
We mould our speech to suit its hollowness.
Truth ! What is truth ? Child, tell me, for you stand
Nearer than I, to Him who is its God.
Is it a gift ? or is it to be gained
By dint of labour, wearing out the strength

With superhuman effort, won at last
When all the freshness of our lives is o'er?
Oh, foolish question! He, whose heart is false,
Can never gain a knowledge of the True.
The sun may shine and shed its brightness round,
But all is darkness to the sightless eye.
My child, forgive me for this burst of words.
I know not why I spoke them. Child, your cheek.
[Kisses her.]
I must now leave thee. Go! my sweet child, go!
And carry home with thee a lightened heart.
Schouiski shall live. Thy future is my care.
I cannot tell thee more, for yet unformed,
In misty shapelessness, lie all my plans.
Farewell, let prudence set a sacred seal
Upon your lips—no word of what has passed. *[Exit.]*

OLGA.

He knew my mother—loved her—he—the Czar!
Oh, blessed mother, 'tis then by thy aid
That I have gained his favour. But for thee
My prayers had been unheard. The holy Saints
Have smiled on me because I am thy child. *[Exit.]*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Moscow. A street leading to the prison. Outside a drinking-booth. Gaolers, soldiers, citizens, peasants. SIMON (a drunken cobbler), &c.*

FIRST CITIZEN (*to gaolers*).

How now, my masters, will it be, think you?

SECOND CITIZEN.

They tell me all is ready in the Court.

GAOLER.

Aye, to a pinch of sand.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Pity 'tmust be.

GAOLER.

Out on your pity ! 'Tis against all sense,
Such foolish prating makes my choler rise.
If no mouse died how could the poor cat live ?

SECOND CITIZEN.

Poor gentleman ! I never thought to see
This come to pass.

GAOLER.

How, fool ? Dost dare to think ?
'Tis more than I have courage for, when all
That one may see within those cursèd walls—
The knouts, the chains, the racks, the swords, the
block—
Are but the weapons, used by men who think,
Against their mates who differ from themselves.
Be wise, my masters ; let your betters think.

PEASANT.

Leave them the block, and let us keep the knout ;
A few smart lashes does a man no harm.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Speak for yourself. Shame on the fawning hound
Who licks the hand of him who wields the lash.
Are not these nobles like ourselves, mere men ?
Why should they keep their learning to themselves,
And then declare that Nature made us base ?

GAOLER.

Come, all this talking makes one's mouth quite dry :
What say ye to a drink of something—just
To wash the dust and cobwebs from our throats?
What say ye ? Let's be merry, boys ! I know
A song or two, with such right jolly words,
That sober Simon here would join in it.

SIMON (*with drunken gravity*).

I pray thee not. I do not like such songs ;
They savour of profanity, and make
Me shudder when I think how sad it is
That men should be so foolish in their cups.

SOLDIER.

Hark to old cobbler ! Bless his pious soul !

CITIZEN.

Let's have *his* song ! 'Twill make us all so good,
Our wives won't know us when we reach our homes.

SIMON.

I will not sing.

GAOLER.

It is a forfeit, then.

A brim-full flagon.

SIMON.

Nay, then I will try.

But first another cup to float the tune. [Drinks.

(Sings) 'Tis very sad . . .

SOLDIER

Come, stop ! That will not do.

It must be jolly.

SIMON.

Jolly ?

GAOLER.

Aye, indeed.

SIMON.

Then, here is one : I made it all myself—
Tis very jolly when 'tis sung aright.

(Sings in a lachrymose tone.)

Some three of us—once on a time—

'Twas long ago—ah ! that I know,

For then these limbs were in their prime—

Sat silent—drinking—thinking—

When all the bells began to chime—

One, two ; three : four.—One, two ; three : four.

We were but three—and they chimed four!

How could it be?—and we but three!

By adding one they made us more!

It needs must set us thinking;

For who could hope to pay his score

If two were three, and three were four,

And bells kept chiming o'er and o'er—

One, two, three: four.—One, two, three: four.

If two were three?—and three were four?

E'en to this day I cannot say

How much it takes to make less more,

Unless I do it drinking.

And then, by working with a will—

The more I think the more I swill,

For thirsty work is thinking—

I turn the matter o'er and o'er,

And find that three and one make four—

One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

Yes! We were three—and I was one.

Hurrah for steady thinking!

I see it now—the thing is done—

Naught clears the brain like drinking.

The chimes were right, the chimes have won,

For what is four but three and one?

So, landlord, please, behind the door

Write down a fourth part to my score,

For I, one, two, and three, make four.

One—two—three—four. One—two—three—four.

SOLDIER.

A pest upon you for your 'jolly' stave :
My brain is ringing like a peel of bells
With your one, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.
Come, I will sing a song—a soldier's song.
None of your mawkish, namby pamby tunes,
But one, shall give the blood a swifter flow.

GAOLER.

Out with it, then, and I will beat the time,
And pledge you in a cup betwixt each verse.

SIMON.

Alas ! the world is rotten to the core !
When will it learn to shun that poison—drink !

GAOLER.

When grown men live on pap, and babes on dew.

SOLDIER.

It is the want of drink I suffer from.
Talk of not drinking ! Why, a parched up pea
Plumps up and sprouts when moistened by the rain.
[Drinks.
None of your nonsense ! Why, a good long drink

Keeps man from withering, brings his vigour back,
And gives a dash of colour to his nose.
It mellows, too, his voice. (*Sings*) Tra la, tra la——
Boys—mind the chorus. Give it with a swing.

(*Sings.*) Beyond the rolling river,
Among the distant hills,
A field there lies—upon the plain,
Ploughed deep with spears,
Sown thick with slain,
And damp with blood and tears.

Beyond the rolling river,
Among the distant hills,
We trampled 'neath our horses' feet,
Green smiling fields
Of rye and wheat;
But skulls that plain now yields.

For so we soldiers till the land,
With spear in rest, and sword in hand,
And casque and cuirass bright ;
We plough, we harrow, sow the seed,
And leave our crop the crows to feed,
They peck till the bones are white.

Chorus.

Pick, peck ; pick, peck ; for the kite and the crow
We plough, we harrow, we reap, and we sow.
And as o'er the land we soldiers go,
The fields grow fat with the blood of the foe,

And the bones gleam white
In the pale moonlight
When Spring strips from earth its warm mantle of snow.
Hurrah !

CITIZEN.

I ne'er had any fancy for the wars ;
I neither want to kill nor to be killed.
The law forbids me kill my enemies,
I do not care to kill another man's.

SOLDIER.

Will'st thou not fight, then, for thy Czar, thou
rogue ?

CITIZEN.

I am a peaceful man, and so must do,
Whether I like or not, whate'er I'm told.
But, prythee, tell me, what the difference
'Twixt killing the Czar's foes and killing mine ?

GAOLER.

One leads to honour—t'other to the rack.

SOLDIER.

Just so, vile caitiff ! Know—the soldier's trade
Has been ennobled since the world was made.
Did not the angels fight 'gainst Lucifer ?

CITIZEN.

Men always fetch their instances from Heaven,
Who find no warrant for their acts, on earth.

GAOLER.

Phew ! Jangle, wrangle, warming up your words
Until your tongues are burned, and then to blows.
This will not do. To give you time to cool
I'll sing a sober, sentimental song.

(*Sings.*) My sweetheart is not young or fair,
With sparkling eyes and silken hair.
But, ah ! I love her, for I'm told
Her silver locks guard hoards of gold.
Yellow gold, with all it brings, boys,
Saved by fools, spent by the wise, boys ;
For nothing makes old Time move quicker
Than turning solid gold to liquor.

My sweetheart is not lithe nor nimble,
She uses neither thread nor thimble ;
For, truth to say, she is too old
For work or play—but, ah ! her gold.
Yellow gold, &c.

My sweetheart twice was wed before.
I cast my eye upon her store,
And in my fancy gaily rolled
Through life upon a car of gold.
Yellow gold, &c.

Some say that marriage leads to strife,
And wisest he who has no wife.
But what care I if my wife scold,
For each cross word she'll pay with gold.
Yellow gold, &c.

SOLDIER.

There is some reason in that song, I trow :
Without its gold, this were a sorry world.
But, for my part, I must confess to like
Gold best when shining on the mounds of youth,
And not outpeeping from the crags of age.

[OLGA enters.]

But here's a little dainty to my taste,
With youth and beauty worked up into one.
She has no need of gilding. Her bright eyes
Are purest diamonds set in virgin gold.

(Accosts OLGA.)

What, from the Palace? Whither now, I pray?
You must not hurry by us at that pace.

(Seizes her arm.)

OLGA.

Sir, let me go. I am in haste. Indeed,
It is most rude of you to stop me thus.

SOLDIER.

'Twere ruder, sweetheart, if we let thee go.
We were just talking of you when you came.

Of me?

OLGA.

SOLDIER.

Of you. Was it not so, my mates?
Did I not say I loved her? Holy Saints!
I felt I loved her ere she came in sight.

OLGA.

If ye be men, let me at once from this,
Or I will cry for help.

SOLDIER.

Oh, don't be coy.
One kiss apiece, and then the road is free.
Give me the first. [*Enter OSWAROFF.*

OSWAROFF.

Ruffian, take off your hands.
She is my daughter.

SOLDIER.

Well, sir, what of that?

CITIZEN.

Just this ; I set me on his side. Look out.

SOLDIER (*who has released OLGA, drawing his sword*).

Aye, that I will. I swear by my good sword,
Your ears shall suffer for this insolence.

[*Enter Watch and Officer.*

OFFICER.

What means this brawling?

(*To Soldiers*) Hence ye scamps. Be off!
How dare ye mix with this civilian scum?

[*Exeunt Soldiers.*

(*To OSWAROFF*) I would advise you, sir, to gain your
home,

For streets in Moscow are not safe at night.

[*Exeunt Watch and others.*

OSWAROFF.

Come home, my child. How couldst thou pain me
thus?

OLGA.

Forgive me, father. It was for the best.
I could not live had all my hopes been quenched.
I have his promised word. He was so kind.

OSWAROFF.

The promised word of whom? of whom dost
speak?

OLGA.

Of him who rules o'er Russia—of the Czar.

OSWAROFF.

The miscreant !

OLGA.

What mean you, oh my father? Hush !
Speak not so wildly. Have I angered thee
To brink of madness? Father, speak not thus.

OSWAROFF.

The thought that thou hast knelt at Youri's feet
Has madness in it. To kneel at Youri's feet !

OLGA.

Youri ! I know him not. It was the Czar
To whom I knelt. To whom else had I gone ?
Father, if you had heard him when he said,
Speaking in softened tones, with tearful eyes,
That he had known my mother—you had wept.
And when he called her 'saint,' and for her sake
Granted my prayer, I was so full of joy
I could not fitly speak my gratitude.

OSWAROFF.

Home, child ! Come home. This is no fitting place,
To tear aside the veil, which cunning hands,
Have hung around to hide a felon's throne. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*Quadrangle within the Prison walls. In the centre a block, with Executioner and assistants motionless and mute. The bell of a neighbouring church tolls. Guards march in and draw up on either side, followed by the Prisoners, with the exception of VASILI SCHOUISKI, who is brought in singly from opposite side. The drums beat and soldiers handle their arms, as an Officer of State, bearing the Royal Warrant, enters the quadrangle. As VASILI SCHOUISKI enters, he sees his Son, and would rush towards him, but is restrained by the Guards. There is a short interval of silence.*

OFFICER OF STATE (*to Governor of Prison*).

Have we before us all who, by the law,
Have been adjudged to suffer for their crimes,
According to the list which I now hold?

GOVERNOR OF PRISON.

My lord, we have. The number stands complete.

OFFICER OF STATE.

Then let all kneel but him who is the chief
And darkest traitor in this wicked scheme,
To hear what, in his mercy, our Royal Czar
Has deigned to substitute for pain of death.

(All kneel but VASILI SCHOUISKI.)

(Reads) 'It is our sovereign pleasure, that the lives
Of all but the prime mover in this plot,
Which had our own destruction for its aim,
Shall not be forfeit, as was rightly judged,
And that alone Vasili Schouiski dies.'

ALEXIS SCHOUISKI *(starting to his feet and interrupting him)*.

Not so, my lord ! It is far worse than death
To live disgraced, and see a father die.
No, no ! This is not mercy. Tell the Czar
To take this favour from me. I would lay
A willing head upon the block, and thank
His gracious kindness with my latest breath.

VASIL SCHOUISKI.

Silence, my son! (*To officer*) My lord, complete
your task,
Nor heed the ravings of my poor fond boy.

OFFICER OF STATE.

It is decreed : That those who now stand here
Released from the just sentence of the law,
Remain as prisoners until such time
As may seem fitting for a full release,
On such conditions as may then be made.

VASIL SCHOUISKI.

Sir, I would ask to speak a last few words,
Before my lips receive the seal of death,
Unless your duty should forbid it me.

OFFICER OF STATE.

I have a task before me, which must end
Within the time appointed. Sir, be brief,
And you may speak, provided you avoid
Such speech as bears upon your late attempt.

VASIL SCHOUISKI.

When standing on the brink of that dread stream
Which flows between the living and the dead,

He who is wise strips for the plunge, and throws
Upon the bank his load of earthly cares.
My friends—for at this time, all are my friends—
So small, when seen against eternity, seem acts
Which once had filled our souls with bitterness—
But 'tis to those around me I would speak,
Who through my leading find themselves now here,
And have to blame me that I stand the cause ;
Forgive me if in aught I may have erred,
And let my death pay ransom for my fault.
Farewell ! In little space all will be free.
I free for ever ! Carried by a stroke
Beyond the reach of man's malignancy ;
And you, to linger out that fleeting space
Which is as nothing when looked back upon.
And yet that little speck, as 'twere, of time
Which I have lived, so teems with memories—
'Tis as my joys alone, would fill a world,
And leave no room in it, for my regrets.
I now must die. What is there sad in this ?
Is the sword's stroke more fearful than disease,
Which makes us feeble when we most do need
Some strength to struggle 'gainst the throes of death.
All pain is spared me : e'en the deep-drawn sigh
With which the spirit takes its flight from earth.
Wherefore, then, friends, should you thus mourn my
fate ?

And you, my son, so pain me with your grief?
Think, rather, that yon block is but the gate
Beyond whose portals stand the Saints in Heaven.
Farewell to all! Farewell to thee, my son!
I lay my blessing on thee. It is all
I have to leave thee. No. I give thee more—
My free consent to follow thy heart's choice.
I will not take thee in my arms, my son,
For I would have thee see a soldier die,
And have thee show thyself a soldier's son.
(*To Officer of State*) Sir, I am ready.

*(Advances and kneels down at the block. ALEXIS
throws himself into the arms of those near him
in an agony of grief. Executioners advance.
When they are about to bind VASILY'S eyes, he
appeals to the Officer.*

Must my eyes be bound?

OFFICER OF STATE.

It is his duty : thus it ever is.

VASILY SCHOUISKI (*to Executioner*).

When I have pressed the block wait for a sign,
Which I will give by stretching out my hand ;
And then strike boldly—show a headsman's skill.

(Remains silent for a few moments, then stretches

out his hand. Executioner raises his sword, but is restrained by OFFICER OF STATE.)

OFFICER OF STATE.

Withstay thy hand, and let the prisoner rise.

(SCHOUISKI raises his head, and the Executioner having unbound his eyes, he remains motionless, but looks wildly around him.)

Vasili Schouiski, rise ! The Czar commands,
In all the plenitude of his royal grace,
That thou shalt live : arise, and hear thy doom.
It is decreed that thou shalt leave these walls,
And under penalty of death to all
Who hold the name of Schouiski, go at once
To thy estates, which thou shalt no more leave,
Till time has brought thee back to better thoughts.
The Czar, moreover, has been so advised,
To make the merchant Oswaroff thy bail,
And as a warrant for his loyalty
Doth charge him to bestow his daughter's hand
In marriage on thy son, and thus to give
A double surety for thy future acts.
The rest are free. So gracious is the Czar.

[Father and son embrace. Guards march off.]

SCENE III.—*Apartment in the Palace.*

DMITRI. BASMANOFF.

DMITRI.

Prudence, forsooth! Had prudence been his
guide,
Where had now been the Czar, my Basmanoff?
I must have some excitement. There is none
In creeping slowly o'er life's level road.
Give me the unknown path, the slippery crag.
The sense of danger—danger undefined—
Which makes each step a gambler's throw for life ;
And then I feel how good it is to live.
Why should you fear these Schouiskis? I do not.
They were made harmless by my clemency.

BASMANOFF.

Your clemency! Your madness—nothing less,
For in the Schouiski, faction has a cry—
A name—to rally round. Now people say
That it was fear which saved him.

DMITRI.

Fear of whom?

BASMANOFF.

Fear of the cowards whom his death had cowed.

DMITRI.

Their puny anger gives me no concern.

BASMANOFF.

It is not anger—that might waste itself.
It is suspicion, and that never dies.

DMITRI.

But often slumbers.

BASMANOFF.

It does not so now,
But turns upon thee its sharp watchful eyes.

DMITRI.

Well, well ; enough of this. But I would know
How did he bear him in the face of death ?

BASMANOFF.

He did not blench, nor quail, nor say one word
Which could be tortured by an enemy
Into a sign of weakness or of fear.

DMITRI.

It were a double sin, to quench a life
So full of gifts as Schouiski's. If it be
That Fortune frown on us, and all is lost,
I hardly know where she could find a man
To smile upon, who in himself combines
So many virtues to adorn a throne.

BASMANOFF (*ironically*).

Always excepting him who sits on it,
And who, methinks, is weary of his seat.

DMITRI.

You fill me full of envy, Basmanoff ;
You hold so firmly when you've gained your prize.

BASMANOFF.

I would not lose the fruit which I have watched
Grow from its blossom.

DMITRI.

It may grow too ripe,
And pall upon the palate when 'tis plucked.
My apple has been plucked, and day by day
It ripens—gains a mellowness—which leads

To what all leads to in this world—decay.
I know no better simile for life
Than this said apple : old as Adam, too.
First, 'tis a blossom ; ah ! so full of hope,
When spreading shyly its pale petals forth,
Tinged with a blush of red, as if a sense
Of shame had mingled with its innocence :
Next, having braved the dangers which beset
The spring-tide of all being : then, each day—
Losing the freshness of its pristine bloom—
It gains at length the shape, though little more,
Of that which it will be ; yet, crude and rough,
Moving towards fullness with such laggard steps,
'Twere vain to watch it : often on the way
Cast down by some rude stroke, or vital gnawed
By some small canker born within its heart :
But should it grow and grow, till ripeness comes,
Complete in size and shape, sweet to the tongue ;
So comely that the sun bites its bright cheek,
And sportive zephyrs kiss it in their play,
What matter in the end ? All things must rot,
And life is but the stepping-stone to death.

[*Enter* MARINA.

Ah ! my fair consort. It indeed is kind
To give us thus thy presence. But, pray why
Do such dark clouds obscure the sun's bright beams ?

MARINA.

Because I see a shadow cross your path,
Which takes the shape of Schouiski. Sir, beware !

DMITRI.

I fear no shadow cast by living forms.

MARINA.

My Lord, you are betrayed. I know not why
This maudlin weakness should have stayed your hand.
It only wanted such an act, to give
The stream of treason a more rapid flow.
Fear, was the only floodgate : that is gone,
And soon the torrent will sweep all away.

BASMANOFF.

Most gracious lady, there may yet be time
If but the Czar will listen to advice :
But I have urged him—urged, alas ! in vain.

MARINA.

Then all is lost. Oh, Sir, were all our friends
Like thee, our safety were indeed assured.
But now I tremble—not with fear, but rage—
In all the impotence of woman's wrath.

(*To the CZAR*) Yet weak, Sire, as she is, thy wife will
urge

The action which a man's own heart should prompt
When dangers thicken round. To be supine
At such a moment, or to vacillate,
Is so much vantage in the adverse scale,
And makes the peril greater.

DMITRI (*drumming on the back of the chair against which
he leans*).

Tra, la, la !

MARINA (*to BASMANOFF*).

Your pardon, Sir. We would confer alone.

[*Exit BASMANOFF.*

(*To DMITRI*) Hast heard the latest form sedition
takes ?

Hast heard the latest cry ?

DMITRI.

Forsooth, not I.

MARINA.

And yet the sound of it has reached my ear,
And sharpened so each shrinking sense with shame,
That *false* seems formed on every silent lip.

DMITRI.

They call me 'false'! Ne'er was a Czar more
true—

True to himself and those who trust in him—
Than I have been. This spread of treason stirs
The slumbering fires within; I feel renewed
With all the strength of purpose I had lost.

MARINA.

This had not happened, hadst thou but held firm.
This is what mercy brings—when misapplied.

DMITRI.

All gentleness has bounds, as those shall find
Who dare presume upon my clemency.
I swear, should they compel me, I'll cast off
The very semblance of humanity,
And show myself the worthy heir of him
Who made his subjects terror-stricken slaves.
Give me to-night. To-morrow, with thine aid,
I will so act, that even thou shalt say,
'He has no mercy—he is "Terrible."'

SCENE IV.—*Moscow. A public Square.*

CITIZENS. SOLDIERS. VANOVITCH. SIMON. VASIL
SCHOUISKI (*later*).

FIRST CITIZEN.

Hast got thy weapons?

' SIMON.

Dost not see I have?

I'll warrant that these Poles shall feel I have.

SECOND CITIZEN.

They say it is these Poles make bread so dear;
Whilst we all starve their stores are full of grain.

FIRST CITIZEN.

This Dmitri is their tool. Yet I am told
He is a sorcerer, who by his arts
Can show in any shape which he may choose.

SIMON.

On holy days he dares not venture out,
For then his shadow cannot follow him.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Schouiski should be our Czar. He is our friend.

SOLDIER.

They say he will be here to lead us on.

THIRD CITIZEN.

A right good leader. We will no false Czar.
We will have justice. If I had my way,
Each man had lighter work and better pay.

SIMON.

And time to bask him in the summer sun,
To hear the birds and see the flowers bloom.

FIRST CITIZEN.

And empty flagons, eh ! friend Simon, when
The summer heat might make him feel athirst ?

SIMON.

So be, 'twere done in all sobriety.

[*Enter VANOVITCH.*

VANOVITCH.

Good day, my friends. Ye have advanced the
time,
And naught gives better omen of success.

The noble Vasili is on his way,
And with him march the best of Russia's sons.

ALL.

Hurrah ! for Vasili, the people's friend !

VANOVITCH.

With him for leader, and the help of God,
We will this day so bear ourselves in arms,
That, fearing neither force nor devilish spells,
We'll pluck the peacock's plumage off this jay,
And place the crown on our deliverer.

ALL.

The crown is Schouiski's. He shall be our Czar.
Death to the trickster Dmitri, and his Poles.
Now then, keep order ! Here our leader comes.
[*Enter SCHOUISKI, armed.*]

ALL.

Hurrah for Vasili !—the people's friend.
Hurrah for Vasili !—our rightful Czar !
Death to Dmitri !

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

I thank you, fellow citizens, for thus
Responding to the call which has been made

By holy Russia, on her valiant sons.
I know you full of ardour, but perchance
There may be some who yet would hold them back,
And counsel caution—choice of other time.
To these I say, ‘ This is the time—or none.
A moment wasted and the tide may turn,
And leave us stranded on the shoals, which else
We had passed over.’ Hence it is, that I
Am here in arms—instant—to lead you on,
To what I feel is God’s appointed work.
(*Drawing his sword, and throwing away the scabbard.*)
So may He cast me out, if I draw back
From going onward with it to the end.
Yes, friends and fellow citizens, I swear
To conquer back your liberties or die.
For ye are not such abjects as to groan
Beneath the iron yoke of this false monk,
Who dares add heresy to his dark crimes :
A gilded popinjay ; a thing so foul
That, but for sorcery, each Russian heart
Had loathed his very aspect. Ah ! my friends,
But for our sins we were not brought thus low,
And made to sanctify a wretch so vile
With all the glory of a race of kings.
I, too, a sinner, can but smite my breast
In contrite shame, and pray the blessed Saints

To pardon me my error, and, if need,
To let the expiation of my blood,
Wash this deep shame from off our holy soil.
I am your fellow citizen—my aim
Goes not beyond the limit of your rights ;
I have no further motive—and to show
My love has wider sympathies than rank—
Would keep it fixed to. I have this day come
From Kief, from pressing to a father's heart
A daughter from your midst—a merchant's child.
'Tis as a comrade I would march with you.
Let us, then, onward ! See, the glorious sun
Shines out on us—march on to victory !

[Exeunt marching and singing.]

March on, march on ! To do or die.

March on to death or victory !

What matter death, for death is sweet

When death in freedom's cause we meet.

March on, march on ! Hurrah, hurrah !

Hurrah for Schouiski, our true Czar !

Hurrah, hurrah ! To do or die.

March on to death or victory !

SCENE V.—*Apartment in Palace.*

DMITRI. OFFICER OF GUARD. (*Later*) BASMANOFF,
then SCHOUISKI *and* FOLLOWERS.

OFFICER OF GUARD.

My Liege, intelligence has just been brought
Of tumult in the streets. 'Tis known that arms
Have been distributed ; and Schouiski's friends,
Encouraged by his exile, it is said,
Await impatient for the sign to act.

DMITRI.

We are, sir, now as ever, well prepared.
We fear no danger, whilst our faithful guards
Defend our honour with their trenchant swords.

OFFICER OF GUARD (*hesitating*).

Treason, Sire, tampers with fidelity.
Amongst the richest corn is found some tares.

DMITRI.

It matters little should the tares be few.
A traitor dares not act when most are true.

But we will see to this. For thee—this care
Shall meet the guerdon that it well deserves.
Go tell thy comrades, that it is to them,
Dmitri confides his honour and his life.

[*Exit OFFICER.*]

DMITRI.

Honour and life ! How pregnant are those words
With thoughts which stand in contrast to my deeds.
Life without honour is but living death—
And death with honour immortality !
It is too late—too late ! Yet now I feel,
Whate'er his guilt might be, that man were blest
Whose conscience bears the impress of remorse,
Compared with what I am. For I have sunk
Down to so low a depth, no sense of shame
Could send the life-blood from my hardened heart,
To tinge my cheek when guilty of a crime.
Yes : I have sunk down to a depth so deep,
No ray of hope can penetrate its gloom.
Ah ! if the soul could die—could cease to be—
Die with the body—be absorbed—become
Another something in the realms of space,
Free from the phantoms of a poisoned past,
Untarnished, pure, washed from its earthly stains,
As some have dreamt of. Would that dream were true !

I then could live. No, no ! I could not live ;
Life would be duller than I find it now :
For if it were so, where had sin the zest
Which perverse nature finds in doing wrong ?
But where is Basmanoff ?

[BASMANOFF *enters*.

BASMANOFF.

To arms ! to arms !

The people march against us. At their head
The traitor Schouiski shows his gratitude.
The Polish guards alone stand firm—the rest
Throw down their arms, or join the rebel ranks
With cries of ‘ Vengeance ! ’ ‘ Death to the false Czar ! ’

DMITRI.

Then save thyself, Basmanoff. I would not
Thy blood was added to the heavy debt
Which I must answer for. Quick, quick ! Away !

(*Tumultuous cries are heard.*)

Dost hear the yelling of this bloodhound pack ?
Why linger here ? My power has reached its end.
I say, begone ! I could not if I would
Reward thy constancy, and Schouiski may,
In his success, forget thy former wrongs.

BASMANOFF.

By you I stand or fall. No matter now
Abortive strivings of ambitious aims.
The name of Basmanoff shall yet shine forth
With some small lustre in the dismal page
Which chronicles his end ; for he will die
True to his cause—and so efface the stains
From off his life, by his fidelity.

(Shouts and loud cries are heard. A wounded officer rushes in and falls dying at DMITRI'S feet. DMITRI and BASMANOFF draw their swords.)

Fly to the window. Save yourself—for us—
You yet may rally them, and I will hold
This——

(A shot from without. BASMANOFF falls dead. DMITRI leaps through the window. Loud cries and shots without. Enter VASILI SCHOUISKI and followers.)

VASILI SCHOUISKI *(who sees the corpse of BASMANOFF)*.

What, thou? mine enemy ! And sword in hand ?
'Twere well—for thou wert brave—a soldier's death
Should save thee from my judgment.
(To soldiers.) Seek around

For the arch-fiend. (*Observing the open window.*)

How now? Has he escaped?

[*Enter VANOVITCH.*

VANOVITCH.

Hurrah for Schouiski ! Vasili, our Czar !
Dmitri is dead. The people drag his corpse
Along the streets in triumph.

VASILI SCHOUISKI.

Dmitri dead !

Then Truth has conquered—Falsehood dies in shame
And leaves behind it but a branded name.
Go spread the news abroad. Russia is free,
And by God's help Schouiski will keep her so.

. (*Curtain falls.*)

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